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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 184**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 21 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Michael: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to the absence of the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and other Labour Members who are attending the funeral of the late hon. Member for Neath, Mr. Donald Coleman? The Minister of State and representatives of other parties are absent for the same purpose.

I am sure that all of us who must be present today to represent our parties in the House wish to place on record our sense of loss, our appreciation of Donald's contribution to the House over a quarter of a century and our sympathy for his widow and family.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. I know that the whole House fully understands why Welsh Members cannot be here, and I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) for representing me today at Donald Coleman's funeral.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Secure Accommodation

1. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the directors and chairpersons of social services departments in Wales to discuss secure accommodation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Although my right hon. Friend currently has no such plans, a review of secure care policy is being undertaken by my Department.

Mr. Flynn: I welcome the Minister to his new duties, and wish him well.

On a day when the fragility of human life is very much in our minds, I need not emphasise to the House or the Minister—who has lost a constituent who was on remand in Swansea gaol—the supreme importance of this issue. Wales has no secure accommodation in which to put greatly troubled children. I understand that a Welsh Office working party met to consider the question of severely disturbed children in 1981 and 1982 and has yet to report. Will the Minister give us an assurance that he will give urgent priority to the need to provide secure accommodation for such young people, who have suffered greatly?

Mr. Bennett: As the hon. Gentleman said, we have been considering the matter. The review that I mentioned was introduced in August last year. We hope that it will be able to report in the next couple of months, but it is contingent on the Home Office review of young people in prisons. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, however, and I thank him personally for his kind remarks about my appointment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: South Wales police have told me that 25 per cent. of all crime is auto-related, much of it committed by juveniles who are often on remand awaiting

sentence for an earlier crime. In the type of accommodation provided in south Wales, juveniles can go in through the front door and no one stops them going out the back door. That is clearly not good enough; it is quite inadequate. May I press my hon. Friend to take steps as early possible to provide the necessary secure accommodation and thus make a major contribution to reducing the crime rate?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. It is true that the peak offending age in this country is between fourteen and a half and fifteen, and that auto crimes constitute an important proportion of those offences. This is one of the points that we are examining in the review of secure accommodation.

Mr. Wigley: May I, too, welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities? He may be aware that I lost a constituent in Risley; he may also be aware that a 15-year-old from Bangor was sent there just before Christmas because of the absence of secure units in north Wales. Can he given an assurance that the needs of north Wales will be taken into account in his review?

Mr. Bennett: Yes, I can give that assurance. All of Wales, north and south, is being considered so that we can decide whether that sort of secure accommodation will be necessary. As I said, however, we must await the review from the Home Office and the associated review from the Department of Health.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments about my appointment.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in a civilised society, it is entirely unacceptable for juveniles to be put in adult prison accommodation or for them to have to travel long distances to reach secure accommodation? Is he aware that a large proportion of juvenile crime is committed by the very same hardened young criminals who are in deep need of such accommodation?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is clearly not acceptable for youngsters of 14, 15 and 16 to be committed to prison and we want the practice to end as soon as possible. Clearly, however, we must ensure that we have the right sort of accommodation to deal with some of the very hardened cases. I have been particularly concerned about this issue, because one of my constituents hanged himself in Swansea prison only last year. We are pressing forward as quickly as possible.

Mr. Michael: May I join in welcoming the Under-Secretary of State to his new duties? I took an interest in this issue for many years before I became a Member of Parliament. In the light of previous Government replies, does the Minister accept that, because of the present financial burdens on local authorities, it is not enough simply to pass the buck to them and tell them to find the money? Is he aware of the evidence given by the all-party group on penal affairs to the Wolff inquiry which highlighted the need for secure accommodation for young people on remand in Wales? Does he also accept the panel's view that secure accommodation will help only if the Welsh Office faces up to its responsibility to initiate and finance comprehensive action throughout Wales to divert young people from crime and to root out the causes of juvenile crime? Will he take those points into account in his review?

Mr. Bennett: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall certainly look at what causes young people to be involved in crime. A range of measures is used at the moment—for instance, intermediate treatment—that do not involve youngsters being put into secure accommodation. We want those measures to be extended as far as possible. As for the hon. Gentleman's question about finance, if we recommend that new secure accommodation should be provided, we intend to look into how it should be paid for.

Pay Rates

2. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on average current weekly rates of pay in *(a)* Powys and *(b)* the rest of Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): The average weekly wage in Powys is £210 compared with £232 for Wales as a whole.

Mr. Livsey: First, may I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) relating to the late Donald Coleman? Secondly, may I take this opportunity to welcome the Under-Secretary of State to his new duties on the Treasury Bench?

Is the Secretary of State aware that average earnings in Wales are 27 per cent. lower than those in south-east England? The figure that he has just quoted for Powys is considerably lower than the Welsh average. Will he confirm that average wages in Powys are the lowest in mainland Britain? What does he intend to do to secure a better quality of employment in Powys so that people can earn higher wages and have a decent standard of living?

Mr. Hunt: On the first point, the thoughts of all of us will be elsewhere this afternoon—with the Minister of State and many of our colleagues at the funeral.

Low average wages in Powys and Wales as a whole are part of our history and I very much hope that we shall make them history. The hon. Gentleman drew an analogy with south-east England. He will recognise that that has always been the case. We should reflect on the fact that during the past five years the average weekly wage has increased by 9·7 per cent. in real terms. That compares favourably with the position in the 1970s.

Dr. Thomas: May I, too, on behalf of Plaid Cymru, associate myself with the expressions of sympathy to Donald Coleman's family and say how grateful we are for his life and work in the House and outside in his constituency.

As for wage rates in Powys and other parts of Wales, has the Secretary of State studied the budget of the Development Board for Rural Wales following its restructuring? Does he intend to extend the boundaries and functions of the board beyond Powys, south Gwynedd and Ceredigion to improve wages throughout rural Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I had the opportunity to discuss the matter with the chairman of the Development Board for Rural Wales only last week. The hon. Gentleman knows that our commitment to the Development Board for Rural Wales is very strong. That is why we have substantially increased its budget. However, we are always considering other means of achieving the objective he describes.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend clarify one point? When the uniform business rate was introduced, constituencies such as mine in the south-east of England were prepared to accept it if it helped areas like Wales by enabling companies to keep their weekly wages at a relatively favourable rate. Has that system come into practice?

Mr. Hunt: I recognise my hon. Friend's point. A large proportion of the uniform business rate comes from businesses in the south-east, but, as I travel through the Principality, I am constantly reminded how much better the quality of life is in Wales compared with the south-east of England. We want to enhance, and continue to enhance, the environment and quality of life while ensuring that employees in Wales share in the prosperity that we are determined to achieve. The prospects for the medium to longer term in Wales are as good as ever.

Recession

4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ameliorate the effects of the recession on Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The substantial improvements in the Welsh economy in recent years—*[Interruption.]* The substantial improvements in the Welsh economy in recent years, for which my predecessors and I take full credit, together with our other partners in Wales, mean that Wales is better placed to withstand the present downturn and to resume its successful growth once inflation is under control. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall respond swiftly to any opportunities that arise to assist in that process of growth.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Secretary of State and I note that for the first part of his answer he did not have a straight face. The deep recession is bound to hit areas such as mine —rural areas—harder and earlier than the rest of the country, as was instanced by the problem with Biddulphs in my constituency, where 50 employees lost their jobs just before Christmas. What will he do in the next few months to help people who lost their jobs at Biddulphs and at other factories and places of work in my area to get back to work?

Mr. Hunt: Although *Hansard* may not show it, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that I was interrupted by a series of heckles from the Opposition Front Bench which I would not want to repeat. I strongly believe that Wales has benefited enormously in the past few years from increased diversification in its economy. It has moved away from the traditional dependence on a few industries to reliance on a far broader base. In their generous moments, Labour Members will recognise and admit that. Naturally, I am concerned about job losses in Wales, but the real threat to jobs is inflation and the signs are that we are bringing it quickly under control.

Mr. Raffan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that nothing would do more to prolong or deepen a recession than the introduction of a statutory minimum wage, as the Labour party proposes? Does he agree that that would lead to the loss of as many as 55,000 jobs in Wales, including at least 1,400 in my constituency?

Mr. Hunt: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. In their more serious moments, Opposition Members will acknowledge the decisiveness of the point that he makes. A statutory minimum wage would be a serious blow to Welsh industry.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister agree that, as a result of the Gulf war, the recession will be even deeper than expected? Does he agree, therefore, that there must be an ongoing role for the UN Security Council to bring about a quick solution to this conflict, thereby benefiting the economies of Wales and the third world?

Mr. Hunt: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for managing to introduce the Gulf conflict in a question on Wales. I had hoped that she might pay tribute to the initiative that brought about the Gooding Sanken project at Abercynon in her constituency. I am delighted to announce that in 1990, compared with 1989, when there were 100 inward investment projects, there are 142 inward investment projects, including the project in the hon. Lady's constituency, to which I hope she will have an opportunity to pay tribute.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend compare the economic activity in Wales during this so-called recession with that under the previous Labour Government? For example, will he tell us about long-term unemployment during the past five years? Will he tell me what I should say to my constituents in Swindon who lost jobs in factories that moved to south Wales because of the great help that the Government gave to the people in that previously depressed area?

Mr. Hunt: One of the best pieces of news to come to Wales recently is the fall in long-term unemployment. If I recall correctly, in January 1986, the number of long-term unemployed was about 78,000. According to the latest statistics, that figure has fallen to just under 23,000. My hon. Friend is right to highlight that fact. We shall continue to broadcast it, just as we shall continue our attempts to attract industries to Wales from whichever part of the country or the world they come.

Dr. Marek: The Secretary of State will be aware that the development of the Welsh economy to which he referred is not seen in the Wrexham area, where the Brymbo steelworks recently closed, resulting in 1,200 people losing their well-paid jobs. The county council is seeking to acquire the site for regeneration and redevelopment. If it can agree a sensible sum with United Engineering Steels, will the right hon. Gentleman give that project his blessing and ensure that there is no hindrance from the Department?

Mr. Hunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that Wrexham and north-east Wales have received a tremendous boost from inward investment, but he is right to point to areas of disappointment. Brymbo's closure was certainly a great disappointment to Wales. I asked the Welsh Development Agency to move in quickly to examine the opportunities for the site and that review is continuing. I hope that any local authority that wishes to advance a project will endeavour to work in partnership not only with other local authorities but with the WDA and the Welsh Office.

Second Severn Crossing

6. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the expected increase in economic activity in Wales resulting from the separate southern link to the second Severn crossing.

Mr. Hunt: I believe that the improved communications that will flow from the second Severn crossing will bring significant economic benefits to both sides of the Severn estuary.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. I entirely concur with him, at least in respect of the non-Welsh end of the Severn link. Is he aware of the concern expressed in my constituency that one effect of the link will be greatly to increase the traffic debouching from Wales on to the road system at Avonmouth in my constituency and heading for Bristol and the south? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the effects of that traffic are completely taken into account in the Road Traffic Bill?

Mr. Hunt: I am aware of that point, but only because my hon. Friend continually makes representations on behalf of his constituents. He will recognise that these are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. As soon as I leave the Chamber, I shall take steps to bring them, once again, to his attention.

Mr. Flynn: I assure the Secretary of State that I speak in a serious and generous mood. Does he recall that when he spoke in a serious and generous mood—his moments are rarer than mine—he told the House that he thought that low pay was one of the most serious economic problems in Wales? Although construction of the new bridge may affect the economy, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the great problem in Wales is the poverty not of those unemployed but of those in low-paid employment? Does he agree that the solution that has been successfully applied in other countries by the provision of minimum pay has given dignity and decency to those on low pay?

Mr. Hunt: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. As I explained, the Labour party's proposals, as described by my hon Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), would deal a heavy blow to industry in Wales and would constitute the wrong policy. The sooner the Labour party realises that, the better it will be for the Principality.

Council House Sales

8. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many properties have been sold in Wales under the provisions of the right-to-buy sections of the Housing Act 1980.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: About 82,340 local authority and new town dwellings have been sold in Wales under the right-to-buy scheme.

Mr. Arbuthnot: May I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend on his well-deserved promotion to his present position?

What percentage of houses have been sold under the Housing Act 1980? As I understand it, the percentage of home ownership in Wales is a great deal higher than in many other parts of the country—perhaps than in any other part of the country. Will my hon. Friend confirm that people who own their houses are that much more likely to have a greater commitment to the society in which they live?

Mr. Bennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about my appointment.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we have sold 27 per cent. of council stock to tenants, which means that, in Wales, 71 per cent. of homes are in the hands of owner-occupiers. That figure is 4 per cent. above the Great Britain average.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that the number of homeless young people in Wales has increased substantially since 1980? If so, to what causes would he ascribe the increase?

Mr. Bennett: I, too, was interested to look at the homelessness figures. The hon. and learned Gentleman will be interested to know that one third of young people who leave home do so as a result of disagreements with their families. One problem is that there is a much greater incidence of the break-up of family life at the moment which leads to young people leaving home.

Mr. Carlile: That is no excuse.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. and learned Gentleman is trying to argue, but the figures show that 33 per cent. of homelessness is caused by people leaving home following family disagreements.

A considerable amount of homelessness has also resulted from the increased divorce rate and resultant family break-ups. We have been taking action on that important issue. For example, we have given eight local authorities more than £2 million in supplementary credit for homelessness. We have also reserved £2·9 million of the cash available to deal with homelessness which is open to bids by local authorities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: May I put it to my hon. Friend that there is more vacant council accommodation in Wales than there are homeless people? In some areas, there are up to five times as many vacant council houses as there are homeless people on the council's register. What is my hon. Friend doing to make those local councils use their housing stock better?

Mr. Bennett: In general, local authorities in Wales are better at looking after their property than those elsewhere in the country, but I shall certainly ensure that my hon. Friend's remarks are drawn to local authorities' attention. Clearly, it is important that there should be as quick a turn round of void properties as possible, and anyone who is homeless will get very annoyed if he sees local authority properties vacant for any length of time.

"NHS Wales: Agenda for Action"

9. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action" issued in December.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The agenda for action in the NHS in Wales was published on 19 December 1990. The agenda sets out the key management objectives and the time scale within which they are to be achieved to ensure that the service continues to build on the progress made in the past decade.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend and I go back a long way, so it is a particular pleasure for me to welcome him to the Dispatch Box and to participate in his first Question Time.

Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government's policies, which have been most welcome and which will do much to improve services in the hospitals, are part of the plan for action and that the people of Wales will benefit greatly from them? At this difficult time, when we are at war in the Gulf, I assume that a number of Welsh hospitals will make their full contribution should casualties need to be treated. Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the hospitals will be able to cope fully with the stress and strain that will come their way and will the hospitals be fully recompensed for the inevitable cost of treating those people?

Mr. Bennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks, but I wish that he had not drawn attention to the fact that we go back a long way because the comparison of the way in which I have aged in relation to him is dramatically in his favour. Perhaps my hon. Friend has a portrait in his attic.

We all hope that there will not be a large number of casualties from the Gulf war which will have to be treated by our hospitals. The Welsh health service is being held in reserve should the number of casualties be too great for military hospitals in England and for the national health service regions there. If any flights are diverted to Cardiff airport, we will deal with those casualties in Wales. We have ensured that facilities are available at St. Lawrence hospital in Chepstow to deal with burns and provide plastic surgery should those skills be needed to treat any casualties from the Gulf war.

With regard to my hon. Friend's point about finance, we have already made it clear that any money spent by the health service in Wales to deal with Gulf casualties will be fully reimbursed by the NHS.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is not there a marked difference between this Government's attitude to the provision of health services and the opt-out of particular hospitals in Wales and the way in which they can find money when pressure arises from the Gulf war? Would not it be better to abandon any question of opting-out any hospital in the national health service so that the whole service is properly integrated and provision can be made for all Welsh patients wherever they are and under any circumstances?

Mr. Bennett: First, there is no question of any hospital in Wales opting out. The proposals made by hospitals in England and in the Pembrokeshire health authority in Wales are proposals not to opt out of the health service, but to become self-governing trusts within the health service in Wales.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Rubbish.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Lady may say rubbish, but that is a matter of fact. With regard to a comparison of the running of the health service under this Government and under the previous Labour Government, there is indeed a marked difference. Under the last Labour Government, the increase in real-terms spending on the health service in Wales was 1 per cent. a year. Under this Government it is 4 per cent. a year.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend continue to bear in mind in his new position, to which I welcome him, that what is important with regard to the health service and the patient is the quality of service and the speed at which it is delivered and not whether a hospital is self-governing within the national health service or run by the private sector? Will my hon. Friend visit the two kidney dialysis units in Wales that are run by the private sector and were introduced by the former Secretary of State for Wales who is now Lord Crickhowell? Those units substantially increased the number of units offering kidney dialysis to Welsh people which have saved many lives.

Mr. Bennett: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating my predecessor as hon. Member for Pembroke who did such excellent work during his eight years as Secretary of State for Wales.

My hon. Friend was quite right to refer to kidney dialysis and I hope to visit the units to which he referred in the fairly near future. In the six weeks that I have held this office I have visited seven hospitals and everything that I have seen so far illustrates the tremendous job being done by people who work in the NHS and the support that they are receiving from the Government.

Mr. Michael: May I suggest that if the Minister wants the welcome offered to him today to extend beyond today, he should set aside his extreme right-wing views on the health service. Will he specifically tell us how much extra money will be spent on administration as a result of the "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action" especially bearing in mind the Government's appalling record to date with the increase of the administrative burden in the NHS and the number of senior administrators that has been driven up by more than 100 per cent. over a 10-year period?

Mr. Bennett We need no lessons from the Labour party about spending on the NHS. The hon. Gentleman should have listened to the figures that I gave to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) which show that spending on the national health service is now four times as high every year in real terms than it was under the previous Labour Government. We will continue to ensure that the NHS has the wholehearted commitment of everyone in the Welsh Office team and of everyone on the Government Benches. We believe that we are doing an excellent job and we will continue to improve and progress.

Hospital Patients

12. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figures were in 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In 1979, 349,695 in-patients and 1,803,728 out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals in Wales. The latest comparable information for the year ended 31 March 1990 shows that 469,928 in-patients and 2,313,309 out-patients were treated. That is an increase of 34 per cent. in in-patients and 28 per cent. in out-patients treated.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures, above all others, show the improvement in the health service in Wales during the past 10 years?

Mr. Bennett: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important to make sure that we treat as many people as

possible in the health service as quickly as possible. People talk about the waiting list. I am concerned to ensure that the times for which people in Wales have to wait to have their operations are brought down as quickly as possible. That is one of the key parts of the NHS "Agenda for Action".

Water Act 1989

13. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his powers under the Water Act 1989 he has exercised since taking up his office; and whether he has any plans to seek to increase those powers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has used a number of powers under the Water Act 1989, and, with permission, I have arranged for a list to be circulated in the *Official Report*. He has at present no plans to seek any increase in his powers under the Act.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister or, preferably, the Secretary of State remember the firm promises that were given by their predecessors on the strict regulation of the water industry in Wales following the passage of the Water Act? Will the Minister explain how any benefit can accrue to water consumers as a result of the purchase of electricity shares, which could not have been achieved without that £31 million-plus purchase? Does he have any powers to investigate that purchase to give the public the full facts of the matter?

Mr. Bennett: Welsh Water is a private commercial company. It is a matter for the shareholders of Welsh Water to decide the investments made by that company. From correspondence that he has had with the Director General of Water Services, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is a limit of 15 per cent. on ownership in the South Wales electricity board and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State retains his golden share in the water industry. Also, it has been made clear to the hon. Gentleman in a letter of 4 January 1991 from the Director General of Water Services that he is content that Welsh Water is doing what is required of it and that, if there is any indication that consumers of Welsh Water will be harmed in any way, he will take action to prevent it.

Following is the information:

Water Act 1989

List of powers used by the Secretary of State for Wales since taking office

Section	*Description*
3	Payment of members of the Advisory Committee for Wales
20	Acceptance of undertakings by undertakers
37	General authorisation to the Director General to enforce the duties of water undertakers under this section
60	Appointment of technical assessors and the designation of those appointed in relation to the provisions of section 60(4)
67	General authorisation to the Director General to enforce the duties of sewerage undertakers under this section
74 and 185	Regulations related to trade effluent
89	The fixing of a target investment limit for the Government shareholding in Welsh Water plc
131	General drought order
141	Determination of the payment to be made to the Chairman of the National Rivers Authority's Welsh Region's Advisory Committee

Secure Accommodation

17. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about secure accommodation for youngsters in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It would be premature to make a statement in advance of the findings of the present review of secure care, which it is hoped will be completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Rowe: May I start by saying what a pleasure it is that an hon. Friend who has spent many years improving the standards of behaviour and achievement of young people in my constituency has now moved to apply, I hope, the same talents to Wales? I ask my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to remember how young a 14½ or 15-year-old youngster seems in his or her own acquaintance and family. Will my hon. Friend assure us that, in the review of secure accommodation for such young people, consideration will be given to the kind of support and care that those children often require?

Mr. Bennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. I remember with affection the five years during which I taught at school in his constituency and the very good support that he gave us as a constituency Member of Parliament. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's comments. We will take them into account in our review of secure accommodation.

Housebuilding

18. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of houses built in Wales this year to date *(a)* by district councils and *(b)* by housing associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Provisional data on completions between January and October 1990 show that 529 dwellings were completed by local authorities and 1, 278 by housing associations.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that those figures are absolutely appalling? The figures that he quoted for district councils compare with 200,000 dwellings a year being built in the 1970s and the acknowledged housing association need of 5,000 new dwellings a year. Is he aware that the 40,000 homeless people in Wales and the 80,000 people who are living in unfit houses just cannot wait for that level of programme to meet their needs? There needs to be an awareness in the Welsh Office that we have a housing crisis, and something must be done about it now.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman spoils his argument by exaggerating the figures. The figures that he gave are nowhere near those that exist either for homelessness or for completions. Private sector completions in Wales in 1989 were at the highest level for 17 years. We are also concerned to increase the stock of housing available in

Wales. Housing associations, in conjunction with Housing for Wales, are now on target for 3,000 completions for the year.

Mr. Raffan: Will the Minister do his utmost to encourage local authorities in Wales to increase the amount of sheltered accommodation, as this is one of the most effective ways of reducing the amount of homelessness in Wales by enabling single elderly people to move out of two and three-bedroom council houses?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, not only in the number of houses released; it is also good sense for the elderly people concerned, as it enables them to maintain their independence by living within the community without having to go into residential homes.

National Library of Wales

19. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to publish the recommendations of the recent staff inspection report into the National Library of Wales once they have been considered by the institution.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is not the practice to publish staff inspection reports and we have no plans to publish any part of the report on the National Library of Wales.

Dr. Marek: I hope that the Minister will think again. While there are clearly items in it that should be kept confidential, there other items, such as charging for exhibitions and closure of the printing press, which merit a wide discussion in the Principality before they are enacted. I hope that the Minister will think again and I ask him to think again about publishing a summary of the recommendations of the report and the actions that he proposes to take.

Mr. Bennett: I understand that this report was prepared with co-operation of the staff on the understanding that it would not be published. Therefore, I do not think that it is right to go back on the word that was given to the staff at the time. Clearly some of the issues that were addressed in the report will have to be addressed by the House at some stage and of course that will occur.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Bishops' Stipends

25. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissions, if he has any plans to review the stipends of bishops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Bishops' stipends are set annually by the Church Commissioners acting as the central stipend authority of the Church of England. They are increased by the same percentage as the average stipends of incumbents. These arrangements were last reviewed in 1985.

Mr. Greenway: When my right hon. Friend and his associates look at the stipend of bishops again will he look at the stipend of suffragan bishops? Will he look at the emoluments of suffragan bishops to see whether these could not be improved to enable these bishops better to do the work that they have to do? When the final cheque is sent to the Bishop of London, Dr. Graham Leonard, will they send with it a fine tribute to his excellent tenancy of the bishopric of London and express the hope that a suitable successor will be found for him?

Mr. Alison: I am sure that my hon. Friend's reference to the Bishop of London, Dr. Graham Leonard, will be well received in every part of this House and that the Bishop himself will be very glad that my hon. Friend found the opportunity to make the point. On the question of the differential between the pay of suffragan and diocesan bishops, I point out that there is a genuine differential in the work that they have to do. My hon. Friend will be aware that the differential tends to be narrowed by the fact that both suffragan and diocesan bishops receive free housing and a non-contributory pension as well as the costs of their expenses and staff.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Since the Government so often advise us that increases in salaries should be related to productivity and not to the rate of inflation, will the right hon. Member take into account that there has been a marked increase in attendances at Church of England churches in the past year?

Mr. Alison: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the productivity of the clergy is noted in the cure of souls. If he can find an appropriate visible and tangible measure of assessing the progression of souls into the Kingdom of Heaven, we shall be glad to see it.

Henry VIII Quincentenary

26. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will set aside funds to mark the quincentenary of the birth in 1491 of King Henry VIII.

Mr. Alison: No, Sir. The Commissioners' funds are directed to the support of the clergy of the Church of England and their widowed spouses and may be used for no other purposes without specific legislative authority.

Mr. Jessel: As the question was, of course, tabled before Christmas and as our minds are very much now on the middle east, may I remind my right hon. Friend that without King Henry VIII there might be no Church of England or Church Commissioners and that, at Hampton Court palace in my constituency, between 27 and 29 June, there will be a splendid celebration to mark the birthday of King Henry VIII?

Mr. Alison: I take careful note of the important event, mentioned by my hon. Friend, in his Twickenham constituency, at Hampton Court. I am glad that my hon. Friend has survived so many years as the admirable representative of the Twickenham constituency. I suspect that, had he been a courtier at the time of King Henry VIII, he would, through his love of music, have survived just as long. We shall all do our best to support the Hampton Court celebration of King Henry VIII's birthday.

Mr. Alton: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one of your illustrious predecessors, Mr. Speaker, might have lived longer had it not been for Henry VIII, a king who did not have an unblemished record?

Mr. Alison: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has pointed out that King Henry VIII let off missiles that were multi-headed, or whatever the correct technical term is. I am afraid that he slew a few people whom we might have preferred to have been kept alive for a little longer, even if he slew a few people whom we thought were well dead. The hon. Gentleman will be relieved to know that the Church of England nowadays is thoroughly ecumenical in outlook and, to that extent, has taken a different path from that taken by King Henry VIII.

Women Deacons

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment has been made of the financial implications of numbers seeking ordination as women deacons during the next five years.

Mr. Alison: Tentative projections of the numbers of women being ordained as deacons do not suggest the need for any significant change in the balance of the Commissioners' expenditure in future years. However, I understand that the General Synod is currently consulting dioceses on numbers, cost and deployment in the ordained ministry, including women. The Commissioners will carefully consider any implications for them flowing from this exercise.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that many look forward to the day when these ladies can become not only fully frocked priests but bishops of the Church?

Mr. Alison: That is an interesting, and perhaps even controversial, supplementary question. I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the decision on whether women can be ordained as priests in the Church of England is properly a decision to be reached by the new General Synod, and it has not yet had a definitive and final vote on the matter. Therefore, any reply that I gave my hon. Friend would be hypothetical.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Refreshment Department Staff

28. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what discussions he has had about payments made to Refreshment Department staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. A. J. Beith (On behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The Commission has a statutory duty to ensure that the pay and other conditions of service of all staff of the House are kept broadly in line with those in the civil service.

The pay of Refreshment Department staff is linked to that of civil service industiral grades and was last increased on 1 July 1990 by £11 a week. A review of the pay and grading structures of grades linked to the industrial grades is currently being undertaken and if, as a result, changes are proposed, the trade unions will be consulted.

The Commission believes, however, that the pay of the Refreshment Department staff compares reasonably favourably with pay in the catering industry as a whole.

Mr. Skinner: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, when the staff in the Refreshment Department were paid single-time payments for coming to the Houses of Parliament on Christmas eve and new year's eve, without a proper unsocial hours payment, that was in accordance with the practices of other civil service Departments and catering establishments outside? I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has immediate discussions with the trades unions concerned, makes retrospective payments for those two days at double time, and makes sure that it does not happen again.

Mr. Beith: A small number of Refreshment Department staff manned outlets in the House as a result of a request from the staff side of the Whitley council, on account of the number of members of staff of other Departments, and of hon. Members, who were working on those days. There has been, as far as I know, no request from the trade unions for alternative arrangements.

Child Care

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on child care provision for members of staff.

Mr. Beith: The Commission is awaiting the advice of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) on the results of a feasibility study undertaken by the Administration Department into the possible provision of child care facilities, either on-site or in conjunction with other public services in the Westminster area, for the children of Members, their staff and the staff of the House. I understand that the Services Committee will be considering its response to the study in early February and I expect the Commission to consider the matter shortly thereafter.

Mr. Cohen: In the feasibility study of the Administration Department, there is no real barrier to the provision of child care. The problem is lack of political will. When the gymnasium recently vacated its room—a very large room with washing facilities which were ideal for a creche—why was that not handed over for a creche on that occasion, as recommended by the local branch of the Transport and General Workers Union? When will this Parliament become a decent employer and provide proper facilities for children?

Mr. Beith: I have a great deal of sympathy with the case that the hon. Gentleman is advancing. One of the reasons why the former gymnasium area was not considered suitable is that it has no access to any outside area, which is normal when providing play facilities for children. These matters are under discussion. The complicated nature of the discussions that have had to take place illustrates the case for the reforms that we discussed last Thursday.

Sitting Hours

30. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the current cost in wages and salaries of the House sitting after 7 pm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: The rates of night duty payments to non-industrial staff required to be on regular duty as a result of evening sittings of the House are set out in the Commission's annual report. Industrial staff are paid at appropriate overtime rates.

The financial information systems now available, to which I referred in the debate last Thursday on the Ibbs report—*Official Report*, 17 January 1991, column 1049—do not make it possible at present to identify without disproportionate cost the total wage and salary costs directly attributable to sitting after 7 pm.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Member will be aware that there is now considerable interest in getting some more sensible hours in this place. Has he in his travels discussed with members of staff their views on having, for example, a regular 12 to 7 pm sitting of this House so that they could get home at a reasonable time?

Mr. Beith: I have found this to be a more common subject among Members than among the staff of the House, who are always very ready to provide the services that the House needs at whatever hours it chooses to sit. I have a great deal of personal sympathy with the hon. Member, but my job as a Commissioner is to ensure that the House is staffed at the hours it chooses to sit, whatever they may be.

Refreshment Department (Profit Sharing)

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he has any plans for profit sharing amongst the staff in the Refreshment Department.

Mr. Beith: The House of Commons Commission has a statutory obligation, as I have reminded the House, to keep the pay and conditions of its staff in line with those of the civil service; and I understand that their current conditions make no provision for profit sharing. Given that much of the staff costs and administrative overheads of the Refreshment Department is met from the House of Commons administration vote, it is debatable whether the trading fund's accumulated surplus can be counted as a profit. The long-term financial future of the Refreshment Department is under active consideration by the Commission.

Mr. Banks: Then why cannot we change the conditions? Everyone in this House knows how hard the staff in the kiosk work, particularly over the Christmas period. One sees Members going away with wheelbarrows full of sticky comestibles to bribe their constituents, their friends and the Conservative party. Is it not about time that we started treating our staff decently and that we stopped taking advantage of them?

Mr. Beith: I agree that the staff in the kiosk worked very hard over the Christmas period. The Commission is constrained by a statutory duty to keep pay broadly in line with civil service conditions, but I shall ensure that the hon. Member's suggestion is again looked at to see whether in any way it can be pursued.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sitting Hours

33. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the progress of his review of the hours of sitting of the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I am considering how best to take the matter forward.

Mr. Allen: I wonder whether I could encourage the Lord President to be a little more forthcoming? What steps does he see having to be taken between our current position and eventually arriving at some sort of sensible hours, again perhaps from 12 to 7 pm with an automatic closure? Has he mapped out in his own mind any steps or obstacles that need to be overcome?

Mr. MacGregor: I have had discussions with many Members and also with the Chairman of the Committee on Procedure. It is very clear from those, and indeed from the public debate since this matter was recently re-raised, that there is a wide difference of views in the House about these issues. On the broader issues, it is important that I should look at how widely to take it and at exactly what method to use to enable all Members to express their views. In regard to immediate steps, one thing that can be done to which I have attached priority is the setting up of the European Standing Committees which will certainly ease the pressures on the Chamber in regard to late hours. I hope that the hon. Member will support what we shall try to do tomorrow night.

Mr. Holt: Would my right hon. Friend care to report that when an experiment not too many years ago involved an alteration in sitting hours, it was abandoned in the best interests of what we are here to do, which is to legislate for the country?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend suggests, there are wide differences of view. Any step that is taken needs to have the full co-operation of the House, or it will be ineffective.

Dr. Cunningham: I welcome hearing that the Leader of the House wants to take forward the reform of the sitting hours of the House. With that in mind, will he publish a Green Paper or place in the Library a comparative study of the hours of sitting and the methods of work of other legislatures in western democracies?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In considering how to take any reform forward, I have been contemplating how we might examine some of the issues that are relevant to the House that arise in other legislatures. We must be careful, because it is not always possible to translate back to the House what other legislatures do.

Mr. Favell: My right hon. Friend has probably heard much from lady Members representing London constituencies, who would like to work between 12 noon and 6 or 7pm. What of the wives of Members who represent northern constituencies, who are working in the north and whose jobs do not permit them to come to London during the working week? The fear of many hon. Members, such as myself, who represent northern constituencies, is that if

we have normal office hours we shall work for five days a week and the recesses will become shorter. That will mean that we shall have less time with our families and less time to spend with our constituents.

Mr. MacGregor: It is striking that that point of view has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House since the proposal was first aired.

Visitors

34. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any proposals for improving facilities for visitors to the House.

Mr. MacGregor: Arrangements to speed up access for line-of-route visitors and to afford them protection from the weather while they wait are now in place. The Catering Sub-Committee has made certain proposals in relation to catering for visitors to Parliament that are to be considered in the near future by the Services Committee. Consideration is also being given to the special needs of disabled visitors to the House.

Mr. Banks: The entire House will look forward to the proposals being put before it. Is it not a fact, however, that, as things stand, this Parliament treats its visitors far worse than perhaps any other Parliament in the world, although I must confess that I do not know what conditions are like in Baghdad at present? Would it not be possible to use Westminster Hall—I have put this question to the Lord President before—where seats could be provided? Cover and necessary access to toilets and refreshment facilities could be made available. We must start making visitors welcome to this place rather than treating them like pariahs.

Mr. MacGregor: Quite a few steps have been taken, especially in respect of the disabled. I am keen to see what more can be done. The hon. Gentleman will know that mass lobbies of the disabled are permitted access to Westminster Hall. That is obviously a carefully controlled situation. I understand that previous studies have suggested that wider use of the facility could raise certain security problems.

Mr. Devlin: Is it not the case that in years gone by Westminster Hall was used extensively for the purpose of shopping and for providing facilities both for Members and for city merchants? Why is it not possible for those arrangements to be reinstituted, with a proper bookshop, proper gift and souvenir facilities, suitable waiting areas and appropriate televison areas and other areas in which our constituents, out of the rain and snow, could wait to see us?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure that all hon. Members would welcome great shopping parades in Westminster Hall. In phase 1 of the new parliamentary building, there will be limited shopping and kiosk facilities.

Office Heating

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make arrangements to keep the offices of Members and their staffs heated during recesses.

Mr. MacGregor: Heating is already provided during

Mr. Cohen: Were not the offices of Members and their staffs, as well as the Corridors, appallingly cold during the recent winter recess and overbearingly hot during the summer recess? Are not these conditions the result of a lack of proper ventilation? Surely the fact that the majority of Members do not attend the House during the recess is no reason why those who do, and their staffs, should freeze or fry.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that some of the difficulties arising from heat in the summer and cold in the winter are due to the nature of the building, most of which was constructed before the introduction of modern facilities. In that respect, the new parliamentary building will be quite different.

However, heating is provided during recesses. Sometimes problems are due to the breakdown of specific pieces of equipment.

Wheelchair Access

36. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will carry out a survey of wheelchair access in the Palace of Westminister.

Mr.MacGregor: The parliamentary works officer is carrying out feasibility studies into a number of proposals to improve wheelchair access—proposals which were received last month from the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), chairman of the all-party disablement group. Once these studies have been completed, the results will be forwarded to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee for its consideration.

Mr. Janner: Can the Leader of the House assure hon. Members that steps will be taken swiftly to make these premises accessible to people in wheelchairs? In the meantime, will he please arrange to have railings provided at the steps leading down to the Committee Rooms off Westminster Hall? It is well known that a distinguished Peer going to a meeting two weeks ago fell. Indeed, he was very lucky not to be severely injured.

Mr. MacGregor: That is one of the access improvements currently being considered following suggestions from the hon. and learned Member. These relate to the Grand Committee Room, the Jubilee Room and the Interview Rooms.

Souvenir Kiosk

37. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to improve the access of visitors to the Refreshment Department shop.

Mr. MacGregor: There are no current plans to do so.

Mr. Butler: I hope that my right hon. Friend will reconsider this matter. When one has a party of visitors from one's constituency it is very difficult to take them in small groups to the shop.

Mr. MacGregor: There are certain advantages in having the shop located where it is. In particular, the current location means that people going there have to be taken in by an hon. Member. When phase one of the new parliamentary building comes into operation it will have a branch kiosk.

The Gulf

38. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what steps he took to discover the opinions of hon. Members before giving his answer to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on the ecological consequences of a Gulf war on 10 December, *Official Report*, column 658.

Mr. MacGregor: It was not necessary to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: Is not the right hon. Gentleman's answer a symptom of the difficulties that this House faces when the two Front Benches are agreed on a course of action? In the light of this difficulty, may we ask for consideration of an amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) expressing the minority point of view?

Mr. Speaker: What does that have to do with this question?

Mr. MacGregor: The point made before Christmas was that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) said, ecological difficulties in the Gulf can be avoided if Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait immediately. I saw no need for wider consultation towards agreement with that view, as it had already been expressed very clearly in votes in this House.

Statutory Instruments &c.

Ordered,

That the draft General Lighthouse Authorities (Beacons: Hyperbolic Systems) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[John M. Taylor.]*

The Gulf

Mr. Speaker: Before calling the Prime Minister to move the motion in his name, I wish to announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

I should draw the attention of hon. Members that no fewer than 58 right hon. and hon. Members have expressed an interest in this debate. I propose—I hope that hon. Members will think this fair—to give precedence to those Members who were not called in either of the last three debates on this subject. Further, I propose to impose a limit of 10 minutes on speeches delivered between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock. I hope that Members who speak before or after that period will also bear that limit in mind.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The whole House accepts entirely, Mr. Speaker, your right to decide which amendments should be selected and which should not be selected. I should, however, like to put to you now, Sir, a point that I raised with you privately, concerning the handling of this Gulf war by the House of Commons. It is a matter of great concern, not least because of our anxiety in respect of the troops and their families. We have had three debates on the Adjournment without substance. Today, we are having a debate without choice. As I understand the situation, the Government intend to accept the Opposition amendment—*[Interruption.]* That is a fact. They will accept it. The overwhelming majority of hon. Members support the military action that is being taken, as do both Front Benches.

But a substantial minority do not take that view—57 hon. Members went into the Lobby to vote against war—and, even if the opinion poll in *The Sunday Times* is right, 20 per cent., or 8 million people, do not support the war *[Interruption.]* I am putting this to you, Mr. Speaker, because of the handling of this matter in the future. There is no one in the House who supports the invasion of Kuwait and no one who is opposed to the United Nations or who wants to embarrass our troops—

Mr. Speaker: Order. When the right hon. Gentleman came to see me, he said that he would raise this matter briefly.

Mr. Benn: The point I am seeking to make is not only that different views should be expressed, but that they should be able to be tested in the Lobby, so that Parliament is seen as a place where different views can be registered.

Mr. Speaker: I have no knowledge of whether amendments have been accepted or not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Order. The whole House knows that I select amendments on their merits. As to the minority view, there will be plenty of opportunity today for hon. Members on both sides of the argument to express alternative views if they hold such views.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I know that you have a difficulty, Mr. Speaker, about making a judgment on amendments, but may I point out to you that the Government motion and the Opposition amendment were tabled at 2.15 pm on Friday. One of the factors enabling Mr. Speaker to make a judgment as to whether to select an amendment is often the strength of feeling expressed by supporters of it. However, when a motion is tabled at 2.15 on a Friday afternoon—one cannot table an amendment until the motion is tabled first—the opportunity for gauging support is virtually nil. I hope that you will therefore take that into account in order to give a wider choice to hon. Members to express support for forces in the Gulf, but linked with other important considerations.

In conclusion, I draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order No. 31(3), under which you can, if you think fit,

"call upon any Member who has given notice of an amendment . . . to give such explanation of the object thereof as may enable him"—

you, Mr. Speaker—

"to form a judgment upon it."

I should be happy to do so during the course of the debate.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It takes up time in the debate. The hon. Gentleman has previously been called in the debates and I ask him not to cut out those of his hon. Friends who want to participate. Is it a point of order that I can answer?

Mr. Canavan: I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that is down in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and myself is the only amendment on the Order Paper that specifically calls for

"a halt to hostilities to provide for a peaceful settlement."

There is a significant body of opinion in this House, albeit a minority, in support of that amendment. Millions of people outside the House also support that amendment, and they fail to understand why the House is being deprived of an opportunity to express an opinion and to vote upon this important matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member will find that, as the debate goes on, the House will have plenty of opportunity for those opinions to be expressed.

3.33 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its full support for British forces in the Gulf and their contribution to the implementation of United Nations resolutions by the multinational force, as authorised by United Nations Security Council Resolution 678.

It is of course essential that the House should be fully informed of events in the Gulf and have the opportunity to debate them. With this in mind, I can assure the House that my right hon. Friends the Foreign and Defence Secretaries will make regular statements as events unfold, and there will be contacts through the usual channels to arrange appropriate debates.

This is the first time that the House has debated the situation since the start of hostilities on 17 January, but it is the third occasion on which I have spoken about the Gulf situation in the past week. I shall therefore be brief. This is an occasion for hon. Members to express their views and then to vote on a substantive motion.

We did not want this conflict. We tried hard, very hard, to avoid it. We failed because—to keep his spoils—Saddam Hussein was prepared for conflict. Because he made his decision, we were thereupon forced to ours. We are determined to give our forces every ounce of support

to ensure that Iraq is defeated and the United Nations Security Council's resolutions are implemented in full. Nothing more and nothing less will suffice.

It is as well to be aware what our forces face. They face an enemy that, having invaded Kuwait, is now well dug in; that has established extremely strong defensive positions, manned by many hundreds of thousands of his forces; that is equipped with thousands of tanks and artillery pieces, together with substantial numbers of aircraft and helicopters and anti-aircraft defences; and that has some of the best equipped and most experienced units of Saddam Hussein's armed forces, the Republican Guard, held in reserve on the borders of Iraq and Kuwait. These forces are supported by an elaborate war machine.

Throughout the past decade, Saddam Hussein has starved his country of economic resources precisely to build up that military machine. It has sophisticated military communications. It has missiles, and it has chemical and biological weapons that Saddam Hussein has threatened to use. As we well know, he has not scrupled to use chemical weapons in the past, even against his own people.

The conclusion to be drawn is clear. We should not for one second underestimate the scale and difficulty of the task which confronts our forces. Nor should we underestimate the time which it may take to complete this matter. We have deliberately set ourselves the aims of keeping casualties to a minimum, both among our forces and among the civilian populations of Iraq and Kuwait, and of avoiding damage to sites of religious and cultural significance.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the Prime Minister give way?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: In a moment, I shall give way to the hon. Gentlemen.

We must recognise that, by introducing these constraints, we are bound to lengthen the conflict. I am sure that that is right. The House should recognise what we are doing: by first destroying his air defences, we seek to save ourselves many casualties in any subsequent land battle. I give way to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

Mr. Livingstone: Has the Prime Minister had any estimate from his advisers about the level of civilian casualties in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I am going to deal precisely with that point in the next few moments.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I undertook the other day to give way to the hon. Gentleman and, regretfully, did not. If I may, at the conclusion of this point on casualties I most certainly will give way to him.

We have heard very little from Iraq so far on the subject of casualties. I will tell the House why I believe that is. I believe that it is because our efforts to avoid harm to innocent civilians have so far been successful. The figures of tens of thousands of civilian casualties quoted by some anti-war groups seem to be entirely fictitious. There is no evidence for those claims. The evidence is entirely to the contrary.

Mr. Dalyell: While accepting that Saddam Hussein, probably on purpose, placed his missile boosting factory near to Najaf and near Karbala; because of Karbala's associations with the grandson of the prophet and because Najaf is the seat of the Islamic university and the spiritual leader of the Shiahs, the Ayatollah Khoi He Marje, is it not important that, as far as possible, they should not be damaged?

Can the Prime Minister say something about the nuclear destruction? After all that has been said about Chernobyl in this House, when we talk about damage to nuclear installations, do we mean power stations, research facilities, cooling or what? Could we have the facts?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will deal particularly with the latter point in his reply. I reassure the hon. Gentleman on the former point that very clear instructions have gone to our troops to avoid sites of religious and cultural interest. That has been so since the beginning of this conflict and remains the case.

If I may, I shall return to the question of injuries. Although injuries on both sides so far have been relatively few, no one should imagine that this war will be an easy or painless business. There may well be times in the days and weeks ahead when we shall all need to bear bad news with fortitude.

Against that background, the first priority of the multinational force has been to engage and destroy military targets in Iraq and Kuwait through a massive air campaign. The targets in Iraq are chosen for one of two reasons—either because they are supporting the military occupation of Kuwait, or because they are of strategic importance. They include the Iraqi command and control system, communications, airfields, aircraft, missile sites, nuclear, chemical and biological sites, and other targets that enable Iraq to make war. Success in this air campaign will make it impossible for Iraq over time to sustain its forces in Kuwait, which will then become far more vulnerable to attack from the air and from land.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not be appropriate at this stage to tell the House that the International Red Cross will be asked by the allied Governments to make urgent inquiries about the position of allied prisoners of war? Would it not also be appropriate for the allied Governments to make it perfectly clear that, if any ill treatment and worse is given to allied prisoners of war in defiance of the Geneva convention, those who carry out such treatment will be held personally responsible and will not be able to get off later by saying that they were given instructions? Nuremberg dealt with that.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. I will be dealing specifically with that point, and with the news that we all heard this morning, later in my speech.

At present, the air campaign is still in progress, and, because there are many targets to be attacked, it will continue for some time. No one expects it to end speedily; certainly I do not. While it is clear that Iraqi air defences have been considerably weakened, in no sense have they been eliminated. As more and more military targets in Iraq are destroyed, the weight of the air campaign will shift increasingly to attacks on Iraqi ground forces in and around Kuwait.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will make some progress. Many hon. Members wish to speak in this afternoon's debate.

Because of the attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia over the past two days, a particular effort has been devoted to eliminating Iraq's Scud missile delivery systems, both fixed sites and mobile launchers. General Schwarzkopf has assessed that some 16 mobile launchers have been destroyed, but we estimate that a significant number still remain. The hunt for them goes on by day and by night, and will continue.

An especially important part in the air campaign has been played by RAF Tornado and Jaguar ground attack aircraft, supported by VC10s and Victor tanker aircraft. They have attacked large numbers of targets in western, central and south-eastern Iraq and in Kuwait. They have concentrated in particular on low-level attacks at night on highly defended airfields, using the JP233 runway cratering weapon, and have done considerable damage. The nature of these attacks makes them particularly hazardous, and they have been carried out with great skill and bravery.

One striking feature of the air campaign has been the way in which the air forces of seven nations have successfully worked together. The United States has made by far the largest contribution, but the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, France, Canada and Italy have all been involved.

In relation to the number of sorties flown—and by all historical precedents—the number of losses so far has been remarkably small, with 17 aircraft lost. Sadly, these have included three RAF Tornados lost in action, whose crews are missing. The House will be aware that Iraqi television apparently showed seven captured airmen yesterday, among whom seem to be the crew of one of our Tornados. Such broadcasts themselves are wholly objectionable in every respect.

Today, there has been a reported threat to use captured airmen as human shields. Such action would be inhuman, illegal and totally contrary to the third Geneva convention. The convention expressly provides that prisoners of war shall be evacuated as soon as possible after their capture to camps situated far enough from the combat zone for them to be out of danger. It expressly prohibits the sending of a prisoner of war to an area where he may be exposed to fire, or his detention there, and forbids the use of the presence of prisoners of war to render points or areas immune from military operations.

There is no doubt about Iraq's obligations under the Geneva convention. I can assure the House that we have reminded Iraq very forcefully indeed of its obligations under that convention. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, summoned the Iraqi ambassador once again this morning to register beyond doubt what our views are in this matter. I remind the Iraqis that they are bound to give us the names of any prisoners that they take and to notify the International Red Cross and provide it with access. They are also bound to grant those taken prisoner all their rights under the convention. We shall hold them to that completely.

We have already asked the International Red Cross to seek access at the earliest opportunity to the two RAF air crew apparently being held. Meanwhile, I am sure that the whole House joins me in expressing sympathy to the families of those air crews of all nationalities who are unaccounted for. We can only guess at the distress that their families must feel at present.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my right hon. Friend make it absolutely plain that, if war crimes are committed, those responsible will be held to account after the war is over?

The Prime Minister: I can absolutely reaffirm that point. That is most certainly the position.

While the air campaign goes ahead, we and our allies have continued to build up our ground forces and ready them for their part in liberating Kuwait. This calls for a massive logistics exercise. On average, over 3,000 tonnes of freight is arriving in the Gulf every day in support of British forces. The way in which these vast amounts of supplies and equipment have been brought to the area and then channelled to our forces can already be credited as one of the remarkable successes of this campaign.

So, too, can the activities of the Royal Navy. It continues to patrol the waters of the Gulf on anti-aircraft picket duty and to play a vital part in enforcing sanctions against Iraq, in escorting shipping and in keeping the shipping lanes free from mines. It has been responsible for challenging more than 2,800 ships and boarding 36 of them, as well as discovering and destroying a number of mines.

I pay tribute also to the many civilians who are playing a crucial part in the support for the multinational force in Saudi Arabia, among them those employed by British companies there. The way in which they have stayed at their posts and continued their work deserves our whole-hearted congratulations.

On Friday, I spoke directly to the commander of the British forces in the middle east, General de la Billiere, and was able to brief him on the tremendous support which there is in this country for our forces. In return, he was able to give me a very good report of their morale and their state of readiness. He left me in no doubt about his confidence in the outcome. Our forces want to get the job done and to get home to their families just as soon as they can. Our thoughts are very much with those families, both here and in Germany. More than any of us, they live with the war, day in and day out, and with the constant worry about the safety of those they love. They deserve and will have all the support that we can give them.

One most disturbing development in this conflict has been the Iraqi missile attacks on population centres in Israel. Such attacks are deplorable—utterly deplorable and wholly unforgivable. They would be so against a belligerent, but they are even more so against a country which is not even a party to this particular conflict. We know why it has been done. We know what Saddam Hussein wants. We understand the cynical ploy. He wishes to draw Israel fully into the war in the hope of inflaming Arab opinion, breaking the multinational coalition and inciting a holy war. He will fail. He will not break the coalition in the Gulf against his invasion of Kuwait.

I believe that he wholly underestimates the cohesion and resolve of the international forces. There is no indication at all of any weakening of the will of our Arab allies. They remain determined to carry forward and sustain the campaign against Saddam Hussein, until he

and his forces leave Kuwait, either voluntarily or as a broken-backed, defeated military machine. It is their choice.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me? I wish to make a little progress.

I do not believe that that will change, because our Arab allies understand the threat that Saddam Hussein represents to the interests of the Arab countries. They know this, too: no one has been responsible for the deaths of more Muslims in Iran, Kuwait and Iraq than Saddam Hussein.

Every Government have the right to self-defence, and no one can take that away. But we have urged on the Israeli Government the importance, if at all possible, of not granting Saddam Hussein his objective of involving Israel in a conflict which is exclusively about his occupation of Kuwait and nothing else. The remarkable restraint which Israel has shown so far is a sign of strength, and not weakness and will be widely recognised as such throughout the world. I hope that the American decision to send Patriot missiles to Israel will be further reassurance to it, especially after the Patriot's splendid performance against the Scud missiles.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): It is being widely speculated, especially in the United States, that a deal has been struck with Israel: that, in exchange for it not getting involved in the war, America will soft-pedal on European efforts to bring Israel to the negotiating table after the war is over. Will the Prime Minister give us an assurance that, notwithstanding Israel's decision so far not to retaliate, the British Government's determination that Israel must come to the negotiating table eventually with the Palestinians and must grant them their rights of self-determination is unmoved by current events around that subject?

The Prime Minister: There is no such deal, and I shall come to the British Government's position in a short while.

There is one aspect of the conflict to which I want to run —the very real threat from terrorism. We are dealing with a vicious enemy, and we have learnt that his threats must be taken seriously. There is therefore a risk of terrorist action in this country, of terrorist attacks against British premises and communities abroad, and a more general threat to air travellers. We must recognise and take account of that.

To counter that, the Government have taken several steps to protect people. One hundred and thirty members of the Iraqi community suspected of readiness to engage in terrorist acts have been deported or detained. Security has been tightened at airports, Government offices and other public places, as well as at embassies and high commissions abroad. We are also encouraging other countries to improve airport security. The dangers are considerable; everyone will need to be vigilant.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me? Many hon. Members wish to speak.

In the days and weeks ahead, there will undoubtedly be many calls for a pause in military operations to enable negotiations to take place. It will be said that negotiations should be given another chance and that compromises should be explored. We do not wish the conflict to continue a day longer than necessary. We do not wish to risk the lives of our forces if implementation of the Security Council resolution can be achieved by peaceful means, but I must say to the House that the Government do not favour such a pause. A pause in the period up to 15 January was one thing, but a pause after 15 January is quite another. Our forces are now engaged. Our prime consideration must be to protect them and to avoid any unnecessary casualties, and that we shall do.

We cannot agree to any suspension of hostilities, which would allow Saddam Hussein to regroup and strengthen his position, simply in the hope that that might lead to negotiations on the basis of some vague promise about his intentions. Hostilities cannot end—or pause—until we know that all Iraqi forces are out of Kuwait. There can be no other basis on which we can ever agree to explore any proposals for peace: once again, it is in Saddam Hussein's hands.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the country and the House agree that Saddam Hussein must be removed from Kuwait? How much safer will we be if this evil man decides to withdraw his forces from Kuwait and regroups within Iraq's borders? Is it not a fact that our argument is not with the Iraqi people but that, as long as a man as evil as Saddam Hussein stays in power, we can never hope for peace? If we do not beat this regime now, we shall have to beat it in two years' time. Will we chase him out of office, or will we allow him to withdraw when he is beaten in Kuwait?

The Prime Minister: We would need, of course, to be perfectly clear that there was no threat to Kuwait. That is absolutely clear under the Security Council resolutions, which we propose to implement in full.

Even while we are engaged in a conflict which may last for some considerable time to come, we are already giving thought to what might lie at the end of it: in particular, future security arrangements in the area, which will avoid any repetition of Saddam Hussein's aggression.

Clearly, it if for the Arab Governments themselves to give a lead in devising such arrangements and in providing the forces to sustain them. The Gulf states are far from reaching conclusions about this yet, but they need to be given attention now, so that, when Saddam Hussein is defeated, the necessary arrangements can be instituted rapidly and effectively.

Those arrangements will almost certainly involve a contribution from countries outside the area: and if the Gulf states wish it, we will be ready to play our part. There are a number of options which will need to be carefully considered. They include guarantees, the pre-positioning of equipment, visits and exercises by military units and the continued stationing in the area of naval and air forces. I see no circumstances in which we would envisage the permanent stationing of ground forces in the area.

Mr. Cryer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make a little more progress.

We shall play our full part, too, in the vigorous efforts to solve the Arab-Israel problem which the international

[The Prime Minister]

community will need to renew once the war is over and Saddam Hussein is out of Kuwait. This will be crucial to the search for stability in the region as a whole. We must recognise that what Saddam Hussein has done by invading Kuwait and now by attacking Israel has made a solution harder to achieve, but I believe that, once the war is won, there will be a general recognition by all parties to the Arab-Israel dispute that the time has come for some new thinking. We shall do everything we can to promote this.

At the end of the first few days of the conflict, we can be well satisfied with what has been achieved. Our forces have performed effectively and bravely. The air campaign has caused significant damage to Iraq's massive war machine. Casualties and losses have been kept down. The international coalition has held together well.

By any yardstick, it has been a good start. There is no doubt about the outcome. As every day passes, it becomes clearer that Saddam Hussein cannot win this conflict, but there is still some considerable way to go before he has lost it. It is important only that he should not doubt our resolve. He should have no such false assurance. What he should have is the absolute certainty that our forces have the total support of the House as they risk their lives in a just and necessary conflict.

4.4 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add

"commends the instruction to minimise civilian casualties wherever possible; and expresses its determination that, once the aggression in Kuwait is reversed, the United Nations and the international community must return with renewed vigour to resolving the wider problems in the Middle East."

Let me begin by giving clear support to our forces in the Gulf. We have had recent and, I believe, justifiable argument in the House about the timing and consequences of the use of force in the Gulf, but there can be absolutely no doubt about the legitimacy of the military action against the Iraqi dictator.

Our forces are now engaged in fighting for the lawful purposes set out in the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

My party has endorsed those resolutions repeatedly. We consider the fulfilment of those resolutions to be critical to the future authority of the United Nations, and British forces—along with others in the coalition—are being used for the precise purpose of maintaining international law and sustaining the authority of the United Nations. They are doing their duty bravely and will continue to do so. It is our duty to give them our firm backing, and that we do.

The Prime Minister has been right, both today and on previous occasions, to add his voice to those warning that this war is not likely to be a war of weeks, and that the Iraqi forces are very large, well equipped and, in many respects, well protected and dug in. No one is more aware of all that than our forces engaged in the fighting. *[Interruption.]* That knowledge makes their courage all the clearer—as, indeed, does the way in which they scrupulously make every effort to avoid civilian casualties and damage to holy places. *[Interruption.]* Their courage is demonstrated in a particularly praiseworthy way by the way in which they express themselves—as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) is seeing fit to do, continually, as I speak.

No one can fail to admire the young RAF officer who, returning from his first mission, described himself, without affectation or bravado, as terrified. People like that are certainly worthy of our support. Those of our forces who have been captured thus far, and who may be captured in future, also deserve support, as do their anxious families. The Prime Minister gave fair notice to Saddam Hussein and to the Iraqi forces that we expect full adherence to the requirements of the Geneva convention. But, thus far—on the basis of rumours about the use of prisoners of war as human shields—it has yet again become clear that, although Saddam Hussein may wear the uniform of a soldier, he certainly does not take the risks of a soldier or follow any soldier's code that I know of.

Support for our forces must amount to more than recording our esteem. They are risking all their youth and all their strength, and our support for them must involve a great deal more than cheering them on. It must mean doing everything that we can to ensure that what they are doing in the name of our country and for the sake of the United Nations has worthwhile results.

In giving our support to the services, this House, and all the Governments who have committed forces against Saddam Hussein, must be able to say honestly to the men and women involved in the conflict that the war that they are waging for the liberation of Kuwait is a necessary part of the efforts to free the middle east from tension and from fear. If, in the wake of this war, the powers that be—and the people who, like us, debate—leave the roots of the conflict to grow again or let the middle east continue to be a cauldron, we shall have failed in our duty and we shall have failed those who now fight. No one in the House wants that, and no one would be content with it.

Even now, in these early days of war, when everybody is naturally and necessarily preoccupied with the immediate conflict, it is important for us to look to the future and to try to influence its shape.

In many ways, of course, the future after this conflict will be strongly determined by the way in which the war is fought, the way in which the objectives of the use of force are adhered to by the coalition, and the way in which the conflict is concluded. I am sure that it goes without saying that, at the earliest time that the basic purpose of resolution 660 is properly fulfilled, the Security Council will want to take steps quickly to end the conflict. That is certainly our strong hope, and everything that we hear conveys the message—again this afternoon from the Prime Minister—that it is the Government's hope too.

Of course there are some who want the fighting to stop immediately and renewed efforts then to be made for a peaceful solution. The motives are entirely understandable, especially to anyone who is part of that great majority who did not want fighting to start if it was at all avoidable. There can be no one—at least no one of any humanity—who does not recoil from the dreadful carnage; and there can be no one who does not want it mitigated as much as possible and ended as completely and as quickly as possible.

However, we must ask whether a ceasefire would produce that result. Would it really be likely to reduce the toll of lives? The answer must be that a ceasefire could reduce the toll of lives only if there was certainty that it would definitely produce an immediate and permanent

withdrawal from Kuwait and the complete laying down of arms by Saddam Hussein. It is obvious that, in the absence of such certainty, a pause in the attack on Saddam's forces and facilities would simply provide him with an opportunity to regroup, to resupply and consequently to resist even more stubbornly.

In Iraq, a ceasefire by the coalition could not fail to give substance to Saddam's propaganda and to add further to that resistance. The result would be to prolong, not to shorten, the conflict, to postpone, not to promote, the end of fighting and to increase, not to decrease, the slaughter. None of that outcome could conform to any definition of peace or peace-making. It would not fulfil the purposes of mercy, and it would not even promote post-war stability, since it has every likelihood not of mitigating the slaughter but of leading to the increase of slaughter.

Meanwhile, as the war rages, two points must fairly be made: first, Saddam Hussein shows absolutely no inclination to comply with the basic requirements of the United Nations and quit Kuwait. On the contrary, all his words are of fanatical defiance, and all his actions of military offence. Secondly, it must be said that, by withdrawing from Kuwait, Saddam could have prevented any possibility of war. Even now, he can stop the war immediately by withdrawing from Kuwait and laying down his arms. Whatever else may be said or thought about the Iraqi dictator, some things are obvious: he wilfully refused to follow a course that guaranteed no war; he does not as yet want peace, and he will not as yet allow peace. If he does, he will get peace.

On both sides of the House and among the general public there is a general and a strong desire to play a part in influencing the future after the war. It is therefore obvious that, while this debate and those that will undoubtedly follow must be about war aims, they must also be about peace aims.

The war aims of liberating Kuwait from occupation and restoring the legitimate Government are precise and limited, and rightly so. However, the peace aims must be broader. They must relate not just to the crime that Saddam Hussein committed against international law by invading Kuwait last August; they must also relate to depriving him of the ability to commit such a crime again. The war aims do not relate to the dismembering of Iraq, and rightly so. That would provoke instability, not prevent it.

Peace aims must therefore include the purpose of keeping Iraq whole and secure from outside attack after the cessation of this war. The war aims do not include the deposing of a Government or the death of a dictator, and rightly so. They are not fit objectives for the United Nations. But the peace aims must involve the substantial disarming of Iraq by the reduction of conventional forces and the verified and complete removal of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and the means of making them. Peace aims must relate to ending regional super-power status for Iraq and for every other country in the region if they truly are peace aims. To ignore that is to ignore the fact that great disparities of military strength and conventional and non-conventional armaments are of themselves major sources of instability.

That unavoidably means that, in the wake of this war, the peace aims must be geared to the stability of the whole of the middle east. That requires firm and dependable long-term security structures for the region, as the Prime Minister indicated. It requires freedom from the fear of invasion or attack for nations. For peoples, it requires the recognition of their identity and their right to self-determination in their own homeland. Stability in the middle east demands, in short, collective security operated through a United Nations with the influence to achieve political resolutions to disputes and the power to deter aggression. That influence and power cannot be wielded by one nation or by a group of nations—certainly not a grouping of nations—from outside the middle east.

It would never be wise, desirable or feasible for the United States or any power to attempt the task. Indeed, for reasons of practicality as well as reasons of principle, it is clear that no power has any realistic ambition to assume such a role. Although the United States of America, like Britain, the Soviet Union and other countries, can and must therefore help in providing, through the United Nations, the architecture of collective security in the middle east, the construction—the actual task of building—is really going to have to be done by the countries of that region. For reasons that everyone here will readily and sadly recognise, no task is more challenging to the world community. As the Prime Minister said, that task has in no way been made easier by the events of recent times.

Frankly, in all the years of tension, conflict and deadlock, there has never been a better time to address the question and, more important, there has never been a time when there was more necessity to address the question. The intractability of the continual crisis of the middle east has caused deep concern for decades, but, because the insecurity and the suffering of that crisis was the plight of others, those wars were often merely regretted and even more often tolerated. Surely that cannot continue where instability in the middle east has now pulled half the world into war. Certainly, when men and women from our country are in the midst of that war and in the midst of its perils, Britain, under any Government, must insist upon effective international efforts to overcome that lethal instability.

We not only have a general responsibility to do that as part of the world community; we have a right to do it, and anyone who does not understand that is ignoring the risks being taken and the sacrifices being made now by British forces in the middle east. Their risks provide the right for direct participation and influence—insistent influence—on the achievement of a durable and just settlement of the disputes of the middle east. That new dimension——

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I find nothing at all in the Leader of the Opposition's speech with which I would disagree, but will he agree with me that the United Nations resolutions must be the basis for the future peace of which he speaks and for which we all pray? Resolutions 242 and 338 must be the basis and we must get cross-party agreement on this. Would the right hon. Member also agree with me that both Lebanon and Syria are entitled to the return of their lands, which have been occupied in flagrant violation of the United Nations resolutions, just as has Kuwait?

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the hon. Member. The purpose of the context of an international conference—I will come to that in a moment—is not only so that we get the substance of resolutions 242, 338 and 681 as the basis upon which to discuss the future security structures of the Middle East, but so that there is also a real opportunity for

[Mr. Kinnock]

bilateral and multilateral discussions to achieve just those purposes of durable security for which countries throughout the region are searching. I know that, in this House, there is a real readiness to provide energy to that area.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Before we leave the list of things that we would all like to see happen in order to achieve peace, would he agree that we must not forget the problems of Lebanon? To this end, one of the objectives should be to obtain the release of the hostages, including Terry Waite and others, who have been held for four years.

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to say what I intended to say later —to remember those, both from our own country and from other countries, who are being held hostage in Lebanon, and to express the hope that efforts that are being made, both here and elsewhere, to secure their release will bear fruit as soon as possible.

There is this new dimension to the treatment of vexed problems of the Middle East produced by the fact of war and our forces' engagement in that war. That new dimension must be recognised by all the countries in the region, including Israel. Last week, with his terror bombing of Israel, Saddam Hussein hoped to suck that country into the war and by so doing cause a fracture between the Arab and non-Arab members of the anti Saddam Hussein coalition. He also wanted to add to Israeli insecurity and to make Israel even less disposed to participate in an international conference.

Thus far, his first objective has not been realised, partly because of the resilience shown by the Israeli Government in the face of great provocation and partly because of the resilience shown by the leaders of Arab countries in the coalition. Saddam Hussein must continue to fail in his enterprise. Israel's decision not to make a pre-emptive attack on Iraq before 15 January and the conduct of the Israeli Government since, despite Iraqi missiles falling on Israeli territory, has demonstrated wisdom which is worthy of respect from the whole world.

Israel now has every reason to continue with that course. As the Prime Minister said, it is evidence of strength and not weakness. The security, economy and, as others have pointed out, democratic integrity of that country require that Israel become a full part of international efforts to achieve a just and durable solution to the condition of the Palestinian people.

When Israel has been subjected to attack and remains a target, and when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation has such close association with Saddam Hussein, no one can or should underestimate the resistance to change. But the present condition is and has been unsustainable for a very long time. The interests of the region and the world community are direct and urgent, and the war in the Gulf banishes any possibility that there can be a return to pre-war conditions when the fighting ends.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): We all share my right hon. Friend's views that the restraint shown by Israel is very welcome, so that the war does not escalate. I also share his view that we have to look to a just settlement in the Middle East, but would he repeat to Israel our demand that it too should also abide by the Geneva convention and cease to breach it in its treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories?

Mr. Kinnock: I have put that point not only to the Israeli Prime Minister and other representatives of the Israeli Government but to previous holders of that office. My hon. Friend will be aware that her opinion, which is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, is, remarkably in some ways but certainly commendably, shared by a large section of the Israeli population, the Israeli Labour party, and people associated with the Likud.

It is of this that Abba Eban and others speak when they talk about the democratic integrity of the state of Israel. That has rightly been a source of respect for that state and that is the basis of our demand that the integrity of Israel, and its security and existence, are accepted and recognised. On that basis, we ceaselessly appeal to the Israeli Government and forces to ensure that all international conventions are accepted and applied, without exception.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: I am anxious to get on. The Prime Minister was commendably brief, and I shall try not to exceed the time he took.

When the war to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression is over, no effort should be spared in fulfilling those peace aims by convening the international conference and making it effective. As United Nations resolution 681, following resolutions 342 and 338, has as its objective the security of all states in the region, there is another feature of tension in that region that must be addressed in all attempts to solve the wider problems of the middle east. The middle east is packed with weapons. It has been obvious for a long time that there is such a surfeit of weaponry there that armaments long ago stopped being a source of security and became, of themselves, a major cause of insecurity.

Iraq, against which our forces and the coalition forces are fighting, is a terrible case in point. For several years, that country, under Saddam Hussein, has been the second biggest arms importer. Between 1983 and 1989, Iraq bought about $23 billion-worth of armaments from the rest of the world. The Soviet Union was the biggest supplier, providing, among other things, tanks, armoured vehicles, multiple rocket launchers, war planes, artillery, and short and medium-range missiles, including the Scud missiles.

France has provided substantial numbers of fighters, fighter-bombers and helicopters, armoured vehicles, artillery and missiles of various kinds, including substantial numbers of Exocets. China is a major source of tanks, bombers and ground attack aircraft. Brazil has sold armoured vehicles, armoured personnel carriers and multiple rocket launchers. In this arms bazaar, West Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and South Africa have all sold Saddam Hussein weaponry and military vehicles. In our recent history, while we may not have sold arms, we have sold the means to make arms and to build an indigenous weapons industry in Iraq.

While all that was going on, Saddam Hussein and his regime were inflicting the most ruthless cruelty and oppression on the Iraqi people. They are now suffering

because of Saddam's aggression against others. They have long suffered because of his aggression against them. The Amnesty International reports have annually reported the murderous details of Saddam's regime. They give details of terrible physical and mental torture. They give evidence of the extermination of whole clans. There are records of children of eight and nine being arrested and then detained for long periods, and of children as young as 14 being executed.

Mr. Eastham: The Prime Minister told us that 130 Iraqis had been expelled from the United Kingdom. The north-west has a number of Iraqis who have been living in Britain for a number of years and who fear Saddam Hussein's regime. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must sincerely hope that the Government will see to it that such people are not exported to Iraq and, thus, ultimately, to their death?

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that it has been clear from the inquiries that I and my right hon. Friend have made about the treatment of Iraqi citizens in this country that very great care is being taken to discriminate between those who in many respects are refugees from the Saddam regime and who have every reason to fear return to Iraq and those who have associations with that regime. I am sure that the Home Office will be grateful for the vigilance that Members of Parliament can exercise in defence of the appropriate rights of their constituents, and I know that co-operation will be offered on that basis. Certainly it has been in the case of Iraqi citizens who fear Saddam Hussein and who live in my constituency.

All the list of barbarities compiled by Amnesty International have been carried out with a vile deliberation in Saddam's Iraq. While they were, Saddam Hussein, if not regarded as a bosom friend of the democracies, was certainly not regarded as the outcast that he should be. Surely that must change. Surely there must be a readiness to pull issues of human rights in from the margins of policy and to include them as matters that are central to the diplomatic, political and economic relations between countries.

I make that argument partly because it must be at the core of any concept of morality which we share on both sides of this House, but I am also arguing for change in the status of human rights issues in the conduct of policy because they are matters of material importance, too. If the tyrants of the world rehearse their oppression with their own people, if they do it with the power provided by imported arms and with the confidence that comes from being accepted or even courted by democracies, then they are always the leaders most likely to offend against their neighbours and against the world community.

I do not argue for our country to be the world's parson or the world's policeman or the world's probation officer. None of that is feasible. I do say that to supply aggressors or to ignore oppression is, by default, to encourage aggression itself. If that is not recognised—and acted upon—in the wake of this war, much of the talk of a global security order will mean little or nothing. More important in the immediate circumstances, the cause of combating aggression, the cause for which our forces are told they are fighting will dissolve in the cynicism of the men and women who are risking their lives.

In his *Times* article last Friday, the Foreign Secretary wrote:

> "We are acting to uphold collective security and the authority of the UN. We have to prove around the world that the UN is not an organisation that can be discounted when one State is contemplating aggression against another."

I believe that that was a statement of conviction from the right hon. Gentleman; I share his conviction. People are fighting and dying for that principle now. It is being applied with force and must be sustained with determination. That is our task. It is the reason that we want the member countries of the United Nations, and particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, to make cogent plans for a durable peace now, and then, when this war is ended, to put it into effect with deliberation.

The result of this war must be part of the foundation of peace. It must be a basis for the structure of security in the middle east. The innocent people now suffering, and the courageous people now fighting, deserve no less.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the first Back-Bench Member to contribute to the debate, I wish to ask hon. Members not to come to the Chair to inquire if they are likely to be called. There have been three debates on the extremely important matter that is being debated today, and I propose today to give priority to those Members who have not spoken in the previous debates. It may be possible later, if hon. Members are brief, to call others who have participated in previous debates on the Gulf.

4.34 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It is a sombre fact that the House embarks once more in its long history on a debate against the background of Britain at war. We must be grateful that the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition demonstrate much unanimity and reflect the widespread support that is to be found within the House and within the country generally for the way in which our troops have begun to engage in a conflict which none of us wanted and all of us hope passionately will soon be brought to an end. We all welcome the Leader of the Opposition's support for our forces.We welcome especially the tribute paid by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the bravery of our air crews in the first week of the war.

Many of us over recent years have been deluged with correspondence that has been critical of the disruption that has taken place in areas that have been subjected to a large amount of low-flying training by the Royal Air Force. That criticism has been accompanied by much anxiety. Low flying causes much disruption of and concern to the majority of people in the areas in which it takes place, but they accept it because they understand the need for it. Surely all those people, as well as those who do not accept low flying at all, recognise now how essential low-flying training has been. The Gulf war has demonstrated already how worthwhile that training was. The training of the Royal Air Force and the success that it has enjoyed have led to worldwide acclaim. Its professionalism is recognised generally. Those of us who live in areas where there is a good deal of low-flying are grateful for the way in which our pilots have been trained.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): There is widespread agreement in the midlands, which suffers from much low-flying aircraft, that training to fly at low level is essential. My constituency suffers especially from this flying. I hope that the recognition of the need for low-flying training will lead to a review of public thinking.

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that that will be so, and I agree with my hon. Friend. He will probably agree that the Gulf war has demonstrated the importance of training our pilots to fly at night as well as at low level. Undoubtedly that poses a problem for the future in areas of the United Kingdom where low-flying training takes place. If low-level training at night needs to be extended, I guess that many people will have to start thinking about the future. Surely everyone understands that it is essential that our pilots are able to fly at low level at night.

Public relations will be crucial during the war. There has never been a time in the memory of most of us when broadcasters have had a greater responsibility for objectivity and fairness. There have been many occasions when Members have been irritated and infuriated by the bias of programme makers. Sometimes those feelings have been justified, and sometimes perhaps not. It is crucial that those in the broadcasting organisations who are in charge of the programme makers are more vigilant than they have ever been to ensure that there is fairness and objectivity.

Ministers have already commendably demonstrated their ability to appear before cameras and microphones in a way that I can never remember being demonstrated before. I do not believe that senior Ministers appeared anything like as frequently during the Falklands campaign as they are doing this time. I pay tribute to all of them for making themselves so readily available to help the broadcasters.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In this context, "public relations" is an unfortunate term. Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that some television journalists and so-called military experts ought to show more restraint and discretion, especially when they use toy weapons with demonstration boards? Perhaps that is what the right hon. Gentleman should be arguing for.

Mr. Jopling: There is a good deal of truth in what the hon. Gentleman has said. I was brought up to believe that an expert is an ordinary man a very long way from home. However, that is another matter.

Secondly, I hope that the broadcasters will not forget what else is going on in the world at the moment. If there were no war in the Gulf, the crucially important events taking place in the Baltic states would cause Members on both sides of the House to call for emergency debates. We must never forget that the Soviet Union is still by far the strongest military power in Europe. In recent weeks we have seen a dramatic change in the control of that military power. I read in a newspaper the other day something that, had it not been for the Gulf war, would have received a good deal more publicity. I refer to the Soviet military's proposal that in the forthcoming year there should be a 25 per cent. increase in its budget.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I agree entirely with what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the danger of losing sight of events elsewhere in the world. I put it to him that the media, too, have a responsibility —a responsibility not to harass or pursue families of service men who have been taken hostage. It would be quite improper to put pressure on such families, many of whom have suffered quite enough distress already.

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said just this morning that the media really ought to lay off these people. Thus, my right hon. Friend got in before the hon. Gentleman and myself. Anyhow, the point is very well taken.

In the case of the Soviet Union, I know that Governments will keep an ever vigilant eye on what is going on, especially in the Baltic states. But so must the broadcasters. The attention of the public must continue to be drawn to events there as well as to the important events in the Gulf.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we could be better informed if the war were not given non-stop coverage? It is important that coverage should be accurate and regular, but not that it should be non-stop.

Mr. Jopling: I do not mind the non-stop coverage, but I am anxious that broadcasters should ensure that the Gulf war does not dominate the news to such an extent that other serious and hugely important situations are excluded.

Finally, I want to make the point that the population of Iraq, as well as the British public, must be properly informed. It is crucial that the Iraqi people, too, be told the truth. We know that Saddam Hussein is not exactly a fountain of either wisdom or truth. We know that what he tells his people is unlikely to help them to understand what is really going on in this conflict. It may well be that what he wants to say is failing to be heard because the allies have destroyed his communications system. I hope so. It is vital that those outside Iraq who broadcast the truth be given every opportunity to speak to the people of Iraq.

That brings me to a mention of the BBC World Service, which at this time has its greatest-ever responsibility and opportunity. I want to refer to some information that I have received from the World Service. I understand that the duration of broadcasts in Arabic was increased by one-and-a-half hours a day immediately after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last August, and by a further three-and-a-half hours a day from 17 January. That brings the total Arabic boradcasting time to 14 hours, and I certainly welcome that. I gather that transmission in Persian is being increased by 15 minutes and that people in Iraq—especially casual and immigrant workers—are being provided with increased opportunities to find out precisely what is going on.

The World Service tells me:

> "We are being hampered by a shortage of frequencies on which to broadcast both Arabic and English. However, due to resourceful work by the engineers we have managed to direct four frequencies at a minimum in Arabic, with six for the important dawn transmission. This has meant depriving other language streams of power, but this has been kept to a minimum."

That is welcome, but I hope that the Government will see that everything possible is done to help the BBC World Service to explain the truth to the people of Iraq, and that all possible facilities will be provided to ensure that transmissions are made at maximum power.

Finally—and perhaps most important—the Government must ensure that there is not a shortage of frequencies. I am no expert in these matters, but I have to say that, if at all possible, the Government must make further, more powerful frequencies available to the World Service so that it may present the truth to the people of Iraq. That can only help to bring this war to a close as soon as possible, which is what we all want to see.

4.47 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I agree with what the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said about the Baltic states and about the importance of the BBC World Service. There is another matter on which we agree, but I shall touch on that later.

Today's debate will send our forces a message of united support from the House—and they deserve nothing less. In recent days we have all marvelled at their bravery and their skill. I speak as the Member for a constituency in which there is a very large number of service families, many of whom have loved ones in the Gulf. We admire the very real courage of those families, who have to carry such a terrible burden. They need to know that we are proud of them and that we feel nothing but gratitude for their efforts.

The Prime Minister was right to keep his speech relatively short, and I shall endeavour to do the same. I want to say a few words about the course of the war and about what I think may happen in the next few weeks. Then I want, like the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, to focus to some extent on the nature and shape of the peace that must follow the present confrontation and action.

The Government are right to stress that we are in the first phase of this war. Indeed, we are probably in the first part of the first phase. There is no doubt that things are going well, but we ought to recognise that there is still a venomous sting in the tail of the Iraqi war machine and that it will take some time to draw. That has been demonstrated in the past few days. It is right to concentrate on the fact that this operation is not going to be quick or easy. In fairness to all who have spoken from the Opposition and Government Benches, no one has ever claimed that it would be.

In many ways, we are in the easier phase of the war. By saying that I do not intend to diminish the tremendous courage, skill and ability of those who are now flying the air sorties. I have a recurring near-nightmare of a young man in a darkened cockpit hurtling across the desert at 100 ft or less, heading alone towards a target. It must take tremendous courage to do that once, but that is done night after night, after night. We appreciate that courage.

I do not want to diminish in any way the courage of those who are already participating in this war, but we are in the easier phase of what we may face. We are in the remote-control war—the war that is fought at the end of a laser beam and with the newest technology. If we move to the second phase—the war on the ground—it will be fought at close quarters. It will be fought between human beings who can see one another. It will not be fought with the newest technology, but with the oldest technology of all, the brute courage of the ordinary soldier on the ground.

We can expect further desperate attempts by Saddam Hussein to try to widen the conflict as he tries to draw others in and to provoke Israel. The Prime Minister has also alluded to Saddam's attempts to try to provoke the allied nations, the western nations and others through acts of terrorism. That will be his determination, and it is right and proper for us to show an equal determination to stick to our war plan, which is now unfolding. It is on time and it has had a measured degree of success. Part of that war plan is, as the Prime Minister rightly said, the important policy of precision targeting—the targeting of military installations. We should understand that we pay a price for that policy, but it is right to pursue it, whatever provocations are levied against us.

We have seen an example of that provocation today in the disgraceful scenes on Iraqi television of prisoners of the coalition forces. The Prime Minister was correct—we on these Benches support him—that that act itself may be an infringement of the Geneva convention. I recall that article 7 of the convention specifically states that that type of activity is forbidden. Any question of taking our prisoners and putting them in locations where they may be close to military targets would be a clear contravention of the terms of the Geneva convention. Let the word go out from this House that that would be a crime against the rule of law and that those who perpetrate or are responsible in any way will suffer the due process of law as war criminals afterwards.

Let us consider our prisoners of war who are now alone, unsupported, in the hands of the Iraqis. I have had some small experience of interrogation and what it can mean. It is an appallingly difficult process in which one is alone, unsupported, while under the most immense pressures. I hope and believe that the nation and the press will understand the pressures that those young men are now under. I hope that they will be generous and understanding in the way in which they treat them.

I understand from what the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has said that the families of those involved have made a particular appeal to the press to give them the privacy they now need in their moment of terrible concern. I want to speak to some sections of the press. There is probably nothing that they could do that would do more to "support our boys", to put in in their terms, than to give those families, and the families of others who have troops in the area, the privacy to which they should be entitled.

I hope that a section of our press will have heard my appeal and will honour it by ensuring that they provide that privacy to which those families, under that terrible burden, are now entitled.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we hear British airmen, soldiers or sailors saying anything on Iraqi radio or television, the only effect that should have on us is to increase our contempt for Saddam Hussein as the war criminal that he is already shown to be?

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, who is correct.

It is appropriate to move from discussing the conduct of the war to the peace which must follow it—a point to which the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have already alluded. There will be those who will argue that it is too early to turn our attention to that, but that is not right. We need to begin now to draw up the framework of the peace that will follow. During the second world war, the allies started to talk about peace as early as

[Mr. Ashdown]

1941, four years before that war ended. I believe that making clear the framework for the peace that must follow will not only help the long-term achievement of that peace, but may help us in the short term in the prosecution of that war.

By laying out the terms of that peace, we can and will give justice to our cause now. We can provide reasons that will increase the cohesion of the coalition, particularly in relation to the moderate Arab countries. If we tackle the Palestinian situation with the energy and honesty that is needed, we may undermine Saddam Hussein's capacity to play the Palestinian card. We may be able to reassure Israel that it is the aim of the coalition to assure its security in the long term and that therefore it has no need to intervene in the war. As important as anything else, we may be able to give hope to those moderate forces in Iraq that will replace, or may even overthrow Saddam Hussein, that, in the humiliation of that nation's defeat, there will be no question of carving up that country. We want Iraq to be an integral part of the peace that will follow.

What is the nature of that peace? The Prime Minister has called this a just war, but, frankly, I cannot be an arbiter on such matters. I do not know how one judges a just war, but the right hon. Gentleman has described this as such and I accept that. One thing is certain: if this is to be a just war, it must be followed by a just peace. If we have fought this war to remove instability from the middle east we must establish a peace that creates stability. It must not be the job of that peace to retain western influence or to maintain the supply of oil. The primary purpose must be stability, for that is the cause for which we have fought this war. The Prime Minister rightly said that the war is being fought for the authority of the United Nations and, therefore, the peace cannot be a British peace or an American one; it must be a United Nations peace.

It is right, proper and correct that the conduct of the war should lie with those nations whose troops are at risk in that action. However, the assembly of the peace must lie with the United Nations. When we went to war, the Prime Minister said—most hon. Members agreed with him—that it was a war about preserving the authority of the United Nations. If we were not prepared to back that authority with action today, the United Nations's back would be broken, it would be useless and irreparably damaged just when we need it most. However, unless that rhetoric is backed with action to achieve peace, the United Nations will be equally damaged. It will be seen by others to have acted merely as a cover for western forces, which will inflict terrible damage to future confidence in the United Nations.

Mr. Tony Banks: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman, but does he agree that the argument that the war is about upholding the authority of the United Nations would be more convincing if more statements were forthcoming from the United Nations through its Secretary-General? President Bush, instead of standing in front of the stars and stripes, should stand in front of the United Nations flag so that everyone clearly understands what is going on.

Mr. Ashdown: I cannot support the hon. Gentleman's argument. The United Nations has provided the legitimacy for the war, but those who have troops at risk in it must provide the direction of that war until the peace is delivered. There can be no other way. I know that the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends have argued for a pause in the war. That pause would be folly. It is a seductive argument and one to which many will listen, but I am clear about one fact—given the statements from Saddam Hussein, even as late as last night, a pause would simply provide him with room to regroup his forces. We have the initiative in this war, but not without some cost. If we risk losing it now, it will cost the lives of our troops to regain it in future. Saddam Hussein can have a pause today provided that he withdraws from Kuwait. That is the basis on which a pause can be accomplished.

I fear that unless we begin to map out the ingredients of the peace—I do not for a moment pretend that this is the aim—it will be not like that of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which established regional stability, but like that following Versailles in 1918, when the powers that had achieved victory carved up the spoils and laid the ingredients for further instability and the begetting of another war.

What, then, should be the ingredients of a just peace? I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will address that in his winding-up speech. First, a just peace will inevitably be based on the terms of the United Nations resolutions in relation to Kuwait. It cannot be based on anything else. Nor can there be a compromise on that. Secondly, as other right hon. and hon. Members have said, it must incorporate the other United Nations resolutions that are unfulfilled. Thirdly—it might be useful if the coalition forces could make this clear—a just peace would be based on the maintenance and preservation of existing recognised borders. There can be no question of allowing Iraq or other nations, such as Jordan, to be divided up. We must make it absolutely clear that the peace we seek is based on existing, recognised borders.

The fourth element of a just peace would involve the establishment over time of a regional security structure. The long-term aim should be that regional security should be in the hands of the nations of the region. Hard facts mean that that will not happen in the short term. It will be necessary to maintain troops in the area. I welcome the Prime Minister's statement that he does not foresee those troops being ground troops. However, I am bound to say that in that passage of his speech he did not give me the reassurance that I sought, which was that the troops that must remain to maintain peace until a proper, regional security structure is in place should not be left in the region on any basis other than under the authority of the United Nations Security Council. If that is the authority for our troops to be in the area now, it must be the authority for any troops that remain in the area afterwards. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will also address that point.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): How can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee a just peace for the Palestinians on the West Bank when by the end of the year 1 million Soviet Jews will be occupying their area and the Palestinians will be expelled? How will we achieve a just peace for the Palestinians on that issue?

Mr. Ashdown: I wish that I had not given way to the hon. Gentleman. I am coming to that point in a moment.

The fifth element of a just peace is that it should incorporate within it a programme of arms control and

arms reduction that addresses the questions of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the sale of arms to nations in this area.

I shall turn briefly to the question of Israel. This is the nub of the problem. It is the irreducible problem which we must sort out in the context of a framework for peace that gives stability in the long term. I can see no way to resolve the problem between the Israelis and the Palestinians unless both sides scale down some of their demands. There must be two pillars on which such a peace is based. The first is that Israel should be provided with the means to have security within its recognised borders. In return, the Palestinians must be given self-determination. There is no dodging the fact that self-determination means the right to choose a state of their own. It may well be that those Palestinians will choose some sort of federation with Jordan. That is for them to decide in due course.

There is also the question of the Israeli problem with Syria. The bilateral discussions with Syria about the Golan heights with a view perhaps to creating a demilitarised zone, are now more possible because Syria is part of the coalition. Whatever the bilateral agreements between those two nations, ultimately they must be bounded in and protected by the overall settlement. A bilateral agreement which stands alone cannot be the basis.

Last week, I pressed the Foreign Secretary to tell us the aims of the war. He did so unequivocally, clearly and in a way in which I can fully support. I ask the Government to begin to think about defining the terms of the peace that must follow. The Government have said that the war is being fought for a new world order, and we concur. The Prime Minister has called the nation to arms because international law must be upheld, and we agree. Our service men are now in the field, not for Britain, but to uphold the authority of the United Nations, and we applaud and support them. In due course, and at some cost, they will deliver us a peace. It would be a tragedy if we did not know how to use it. It would be a catastrophe if the reasons for fighting the war were abandoned in the peace which will follow it.

It will help both in the prosecution of the war and in the building of a just peace to follow if the allies begin to lay out the framework for that peace now.

5.5 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I cannot but contrast the fact that we in the House, widely representative of the British people as we are with every one of us having a constituent involved directly or indirectly, are debating within a few days of the outbreak of war the various elements that have brought us to it with what might be happening in Baghdad, where there is no assembly of any representative, let alone elected, kind which has a chance of offering informed opposition to the Government who have ruled Iraq.

Dr. Godman: What about Saudi Arabia?

Sir Giles Shaw: Yes, many other Arab states similarly have no democratically elected institution. In the light of what we are discussing, it is essential that we keep reminding ourselves why the war has been started following the invasion of Kuwait in August, although I do not wish to go into the niceties of the peace, as did the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Obviously, we are here because of the enormous reactions to that invasion.

Never since the end of the second world war has the United Nations produced such a majority in favour of taking action. We are here because we are willed to be a party to this action by nations drawn from all points of the geographical compass, including many Muslim nations. We must remember that although not many Muslim nations are participating in the allied force, their reaction has been amazingly strong. The fact that Gaddafi has shown himself strongly antagonistic to Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait is an interesting, and unique, straw in the wind.

We are here because we are, as we have always been, a firm participator in United Nations activities. We seek to ensure that its resolutions, including 606 and 678, are upheld. We are here, too, because the five and a half months of effort to settle these issues peacefully and the many direct and multiple diplomatic efforts have failed.

Some have suggested that sanctions should have been continued for a longer period. That is possible, but there is no question in my mind that the type of leadership in Iraq would not respond to the threat posed by sanctions. If the large population of 16 million had an elected assembly, the democratic pressures could be observed, but that is not the case. The people of Iraq are used to privation in times of war: it takes much more than sanctions to stir them against their indigenous leadership. Iraq has a large and fertile capacity for food production and, in comparison with other Arab states, can expand it pretty easily.

Above all—as has been said so eloquently today—the scale of the military paraphernalia assembled in Iraq in the relatively recent past would be the last element in that state to be affected by the sort of sanctions that were imposed. It is not surprising that there has been no sign of any real change of mind on the part of the leadership, or of any real advantage in the imposition of sanctions—apart from the time that that has allowed for the preparation of an allied force and its assembly in Arabia as a defender of the UN's endeavour, a deterrent of further aggression and a body that can, if needs must, act as a strong retaliatory unit.

This is called "the Gulf war"; today's Order Paper states merely that the subject of our debate is "The Gulf". That Gulf—a vast and long sea inlet—is certainly a major geographical feature, and is aptly named, but the Persian Gulf is more than that: it is a meeting of civilisations from east and west, Christian and Muslim, Arab and Jew; the Kurds from the north and Nubians from the south; rich states and poor states, slave and free.

Those are all elements in the embroidery of history around this extraordinary area, which has been the historic cradle of several civilisations. The region, after all, includes both Ararat and Eden, both Persepolis and Babylon, both Bethlehem and Mecca. It has a violent and turbulent history, which has left the Gulf notoriously unstable. In that sense, the Gulf is an unfathomable abyss; certainly, it appears dark and full of foreboding to those who unwillingly become involved in it.

"Gulf", however, has another meaning in common parlance. It can signify a divide between peoples; a lack of understanding between man and man; the way in which suspicion and mistrust are so easily bred; religious differences—even within Islam; jealousy and bitterness

[Sir Giles Shaw]

between the oil-rich states on the one hand and impoverished states on the other. That, too, is a significant element and we ignore it at our peril.

It is for those reasons that the course of the present conflict is so difficult to predict. Like everyone here, I am confident that the war will be won, but I am not confident that it will be short or easy. I very much admire the amazing, awesome technology that has been shown to offer a military precision never before achieved in war: long may it continue to be as effective as we believe it to be now. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily likely to persuade 16 million Iraqis to remove the style of leadership that they have endured for more than 30 years. Persuasion and reason may have all on to win the argument when the Muslim faith is seen as being under attack by the infidel outside and by western imperialists—as it always was.

That is the sort of reaction that we may face: it is the sort of strength that nations of this character may offer to deal with any sort of attack. We must see it through, however, and we must be absolutely firm in our support for those whose task is to prosecute the war.

We must also accept—again, this is in common parlance—that a gulf is there be be bridged. Is this the time, or the opportunity, for that to be done? To win the war will certainly not be easy, but, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil pointed out, to win the peace will be a Herculean task. Yet the allied cause already includes major, significant Muslim countries that are related to the region—Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Pakistan. All those states will be hugely influential in the ultimate peace described by the right hon. Gentleman. The allied cause is, moreover, underwritten by all the super-powers, which must give it an even better chance of emerging into a satisfactory peace.

The alliance must hold, and must be cultivated through the efforts that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary can make so well to ensure that it emerges victorious at the end of the day. Then, given United Nations support, the prospect of that satisfactory peace will be possible. The winning of a lasting peace will, however, require the patience and dedication of a saint—in God's name, and in Allah's, too.

5.16 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I still cannot believe that a civilised alliance has gone to war. I feel that I am living a nightmare. The most terrifying scenario is being played out nightly on our television screens, as the mightiest and most advanced technological war machine in the world rains down its armoury of death on the people of Iraq. On the other side, the vicious dictator Saddam Hussein—the mass murderer of Halabja—leads his desperate nation into further death and suffering, and terrorises the Saudi and Israeli civilian populations.

During the past five months—along with many of my colleagues and as part of a wide group of people—I have used what energies I possess, and what little talent and influence, to try to prevent the use of the military option. I have been derided for my efforts both in the House and outside—by Conservative Members, but never by my hon. Friends—but I was convinced that sanctions could work if given a chance. It would seem, however, that President Bush never intended them to work; our Government now support his claims, and we have gone to war.

The director of the CIA, William Webster—whose credentials are, I should have thought, impeccable—told the United States armed services committee that sanctions were working: according to him,

"more than 90 per cent. of imports and 97 per cent. of exports have been shut off",

and smuggling across the border was on a very small scale.

We know that Iraq is not self-sufficient in most foodstuffs—it imports two thirds of its grain—and food was therefore a problem. Hon. Members who went to Iraq in a gallant attempt to get hostages out said that food prices were escalating and that great difficulties were being experienced; moreover, spare part shortages would affect the military sooner or later.

Now that we are at war, the debate on whether sanctions were given a fair chance to work will have to be delayed. Nevertheless, the House should hold the Chairmen of the Select Committees on Foreign Affairs and on Defence to account. They should be asked why sanctions were not monitored and why Committee discussions did not take place three or four times a week. If Select Committees cannot undertake such a task, what is their purpose?

We know that President Bush decided on the military option last November, if not before. Now we are in this dreadful war. Perhaps, however, we can learn some lessons from the way in which we behaved in the past. Perhaps we should start asking now why we went into this war. We did not go to war to safeguard human rights. We have traded with Saddam Hussein for a very long time. Today I received information from the Library about the export credits that were agreed bilaterally between the United Kingdom and Iraq up to 1989. In 1988, £200 million was spent on capital goods, £65 million on a power station project and £75 million on pharmaceuticals. I wonder whether it was that power station that was bombed with such precision?

We have been told for many years how evil is the Iraqi regime. For many years, I have supported the Campaign against Repression and for Democratic Representation in Iraq. The Prime Minister said, rightly, that Saddam Hussein starved his country of resources to build up his military machine. We knew that before 2 August 1990. I was one of the 91 Members of Parliament who, in May 1989, opposed the Government's financial support for the 17 British firms which exhibited at the Baghdad arms fair. I presume that senior members of the Government, who now form the war cabinet, knew about that. Eight days after Iraq bombed Halabja with chemical weapons, when 5,000 people were murdered by the butcher of Baghdad, the Government expressed their distress, but that did not prevent them from providing £400 million of export credits to British firms to increase their trade with Baghdad. We shall have to debate that question again and again when the war is over.

I have thought long and hard about whether the United Nations supports the upholding of international law. When I look at the list of abuses that have been committed over the years, I see that there were United Nations resolutions on Grenada, Panama, Cyprus, the occupied territories and Tibet, which could have been implemented, but they were not.

Hostilities have now begun, and our service men and women are in grave danger. I do not agree with all that has been said about the press. The *Halifax Evening Courier*, my local paper, has published pictures of all the young service men and women who are going to and who are in the Gulf. It has set up a support group for parents and relatives who are worried about their loved ones in the Gulf. I carry those pictures with me everywhere to remind myself of their humanity. Some of them probably went to school with my two sons. If the war goes on and on, my sons may be caught up in it.

I support that paper's initiative. I wrote to all of them this weekend—as citizens of Halifax were asked to do—saying, "I want you to come home soon, and I give you my total support." To try to "lift" the letter a little I said, "If you come back home quickly I shall buy you a drink in the House of Commons or in the Brass Cat in Halifax, whichever you prefer." They might think that to come to the House of Commons would be a punishment rather than a reward, but the offer is genuine.

I deeply resent the fact that the Government have not allowed a debate to be held on going to war. I am sad that we cannot vote on the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) which I fully support. The amendment fully supports our brave men and women in the Gulf, but it also refers to the need for a peaceful settlement. It is beyond my comprehension why those who argue for peace and who urged that initiatives should be undertaken so that the killing would not start are derided and abused. I do not understand why it is said that it is wrong to argue the case for peace. If we are accused tonight of not supporting our service men and women, it will be a lie that stands truth on its head.

I shall let the parents of one person who is serving in the Gulf put that argument to the House for me. Many hon. Members received this letter just before the war started in the Gulf. The parents of that soldier say:

"We wish to register our concern at the way this country is being led into military conflict. We support our young men in the task they may have to undertake and as history shows they will, without doubt, do their duty. The question is, have this Government done their duty? They appear to have been pulled into this situation led initially by America, Mrs. Thatcher and the Government. I fear that the majority of the Labour party have unfortunately followed their example."

I do not agree; I do not believe that any of my hon. Friends want war. The letter also said:

"Surely if the entire world does condemn Saddam Hussein then the combined talents of their politicians could find a better way of bringing him to justice than the sacrifices of thousands of ordinary peoples lives on both sides . . . Our soldiers may be professionals, but they are also citizens and sons. Historically we have all been prepared to make sacrifices for the defence of freedom and democracy. I fear that these high ideals are not the motivating force in this situation. Our forces in the Gulf are showing skill, courage and loyalty which I am sure all admire. What a tragedy it would be if these talents were sacrificed needlessly on false altars."

I refuse to be bullied by the four press barons who own 93 per cent. of the press and who sit in their comfortable offices whipping up war hysteria and using the most foul invective against those who oppose this war. That must not deter any of us who support peace initiatives. The United Nations should be urged to stop listening to the United States and to stop acting solely on its behalf. It should be in permanent session and should examine every proposal, wherever it may come from. I plead with the Government, even now, to listen to the United Nations before the horrendous ground war starts.

After the war is over, we shall have to overcome its bitter legacy. The Arab nations will take stock of the devastation inflicted on one Arab nation. What plans do we have to help the third world if Saddam Hussein carries out his threat to fire the oilfields? Thick black clouds will block out the sun and destroy crops in the subcontinent of India. Those poor people—arguably the poorest in the world—will face even greater hardships if the crops fail. Can we be told how we shall help them if we must carry forward this war? What plans do we have for the millions who will starve and suffer?

If Jordan ends in turmoil, President Assad of Syria—now our gallant ally, who has no better human rights record than Saddam Hussein—may seek his reward by stealing land. The murderous ayatollahs in Iran may extend their influence in a bitter and beaten Iraq. What plans do our leaders have to counter those threats? What guarantee can we give to the Palestinian people that there will be peace?

At the end of this awful bloodshed, people with the right credentials will have to sit down and work out a settlement. How much better for humankind it would have been if that could have been done without this war ever having started.

5.28 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) will not, I hope, under any circumstances be derided or abused for the words that she has used. I do not agree with what she said, but she spoke with great sincerity and she doubtless speaks for a significant number of people, including some hon. Members. It is right and proper that those views should be expressed strongly in this House. It is equally proper that those who disagree with her should be able to do so in our democratic forum. That is exactly the purpose of this debate, and that is why I welcome it.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose*——

Mr. Latham: I have not said anything controversial, but I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman has not said anything controversial, but given the eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), with which I thoroughly agreed, is it not a pity that hon. Members who thoroughly agree with her will not have the opportunity to vote accordingly tonight?

Mr. Latham: It is not for me to legislate on such matters. I support the Government and the Opposition amendment, and I shall say more about that in a moment.

I want to begin by paying two tributes. There are four service bases in my constituency, two of the Royal Air Force and two of the Army. I want to pay tribute to all our service men and women in the Gulf and particularly their families, to whom the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) drew attention. The Tornado pilots who are performing so bravely are trained at RAF Cottesmore in my constituency, as are the pilots of the Italian air force who are engaged in this conflict. It is only proper that I should pay tribute to them.

[Mr. Latham]

I should like to take up a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) about the BBC World Service. I had the honour of visiting Caversham Park last Thursday morning and seeing the monitoring that is carried out there. I pay tribute to that work, which is sometimes regarded as the Cinderella of the World Service. What is done at Bush house is tremendously important, but the monitoring at Caversham Park of everything that is being said and of the political speeches that are being made in this conflict is terribly important. It is right that that work is recognised in the House.

I want to say something about Israel, and I do so having just returned from Israel with a deputation of Conservative Members. We met Labour Members who were there for a similar purpose, and had two joint meetings with Prime Minister Shamir and Defence Minister Arens. I am not a Jew. I have no Jewish relations, no Jewish constituents that I know of and certainly no business interests in Jewish circles or the middle east. I support the cause of Israel because I believe it to be a honourable and inspiring cause, and always have done.

Therefore, the House will understand that, like many other hon. Members, I was deeply moved by the sight of missiles landing on Tel Aviv, on a country that is not involved in the conflict, that has not taken any part so far in the coalition and that has not been asked to do so. I was delighted that the Leader of the Opposition, in a very good speech, strongly stressed his support for the restraint that Israel has shown, and in so doing echoed the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Israel's restraint has been quite extraordinary. I do not believe that any other country in the world would allow a country to rain missiles for two consecutive nights on its civilian population and not immediately retaliate. Any other country would have done so. Israel has not done so —I am delighted that it has not—despite the fact that no country can be more horrified of being attacked than Israel and no people can be more concerned about the possibility of a gas attack than the Jewish people in a Jewish state. Can we think of anything more emotive than for Jewish people in a Jewish state to be sealing their rooms and doors to keep out gas? The House will immediately realise, whatever its view on the middle east situation, that that position is one of the greatest possible emotion and that it has put immense pressure on the people and Government of Israel. That is why it is all the more remarkable and praiseworthy that they have not retaliated.

Many hon. Members have referred to the need to return to the overall peace settlement in the middle east after the war is over—as does the Opposition amendment, which I accept and support. It is right that that should be addressed. It will have to be addressed, as the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister rightly said, on the basis of Security Council resolution 242 and resolution 338, which in practice is a repetition of 242. We must remember that there are two sides to 242—the relinquishment of territories occupied by armed conflict, which undoubtedly must be discussed in the peace conference, and the security and integrity of all states in the region, including the state of Israel. Let there be no doubt whatever about those two points.

Equally, let there be no doubt that, if there is to be a successful peace conference, at the United Nations or in whatever forum is considered appropriate, it must be one to which the participants come willingly and from which they expect a just, honourable and lasting peace to emerge. The parties to the conference must not expect to be the victims of an imposed settlement. Therefore, although we must debate the structure of the middle east after the war has been successfully prosecuted, God willing, we must be clear in our own minds that the outcome must be agreeable to all the parties to the conference and must not be an imposed settlement.

As, unfortunately, the PLO has supported Saddam Hussein, it would be idle to pretend that the present situation is ideal for convincing the people of Israel that they should talk to the PLO. Nevertheless, I have advocated in the House that Israel should talk to the PLO. In his speech in Geneva two years ago, Mr. Arafat was prepared to recognise the state of Israel. However, the PLO's support of Saddam Hussein makes the climate difficult.

There is no doubt that Israel can make peace with Syria. The matters in dispute are clear.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Latham: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) for his indicating assent. They are not easy to resolve, but they can be resolved. The United Nations has done outstanding work in implementing the disengagement agreements between Syria and Israel. There have been no difficulties on the frontier of the Golan heights since the disengagement agreements were reached in 1974. Such agreement could be negotiated directly between Syria and Israel or under United Nations supervision. If it is negotiated, the conflicts in the Lebanon could also be negotiated, as nine tenths of Lebanon is controlled by the Syrian army.

The situation on the West Bank and in Gaza is different and will have to be negotiated differently. Negotiations will certainly have to involve elected representatives of the Palestinians. We must face the fact that democratic elections, in Gaza in particular, may return not a PLO majority but a Hamas majority, and some PLO spokesmen have admitted that that may be so. If the forces of moderation are to emerge, it must be by Palestinian leaders being elected locally, with outside support and the involvement of Jordan. It is very important to address that now.

If there is to be a peace conference after the war—undoubtedly there must be—which resolves peace on the basis of resolution 242, which involves both territories and land, it will have to be one which the democratically elected Government of Israel can sell to their people. That would be impossible in the present circumstances of Israel suffering unprovoked attacks, but the Israeli Government must be able to say to their people, "This brings us a secure future."

There is a slogan in Israel, which unfortunately is linked to one political wing, but which should be the slogan of the whole nation—"Peace now, before it is too late." I say to the leaders of the world that, when they resolve these matters after the war is over, peace now will involve a secure Jewish state. It will undoubtedly involve proper rights for the Palestinian people, the integrity of all states

in the region and the Jewish mothers of Israel and of the Palestinian people being able to say to themselves, "Never again are our children going to be sent to war."

5.38 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I intend to pick up some of the points made in the eloquent speech of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), but I begin by addressing myself to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I disagree with some of her points, but she said that when she had been trying to secure peace, she had been derided. It is absurd to deride anyone seeking peace, and anyone who mocks my hon. Friend deserves contempt. It is preposterous to deride such an aim, whatever emerges.

My hon. Friend said that she did not want to be accused of not supporting our service men. Anyone who accuses her of not wanting to support them should be reprimanded. Clearly my hon. Friend passionately supports our service men. If such allegations were levelled at her across the Chamber, they would be outrageous. Of course, I fully endorse her comments about the need to help the third world, especially given the devastation that has been caused.

Nevertheless, I believe that my hon. Friend and people like her are sending the wrong signal to Baghdad in calling for a ceasefire. If there were an immediate ceasefire, it would be the biggest boost to unprovoked aggression since Chamberlain waved his little piece of paper 50 years or so ago. That would send entirely the wrong signal to Saddam Hussein, who would be further encouraged to invade more countries and to dominate the middle east. We do not want a ceasefire that makes it appear as though we are backing off.

There are two vital requirements now: to win the war, backing our service men all the way, and to win the peace, as many people have said. I have a constituency interest in the conflict, because the Staffordshire Regiment is involved. It contains troops from Stoke-on-Trent. They deserve all the encouragement that we can give and I hope that the House will give them overwhelming support. Their efforts, skill and, above all, sacrifice merit more than winning the war; we must move towards winning the peace. The prospects of winning the peace look much less secure now than they did a few weeks ago. We are winning the war, but we do not look as though we are beginning to win the peace. I am less sanguine now than I was.

One day, we must have a conference to discuss a permanent peace in the middle east, but the prospects for that conference will be damaged if commitments about the future are given in the heat of battle. There are reports today in the press that the United States has pledged Israel that it will oppose a United Nations-organised conference after the war. When the Prime Minister was challenged about that this afternoon, he said that there had been no such deal. Fine, but he did not say that there will be no such deal. It may be in the air.

It is vital that no unwise pledges are made by the western powers as a payment for Israeli restraint. Some Israeli spokesmen are already implying that there is a debt to be paid by the western powers for Israel's restraint. Some western spokesmen have said that they are grateful for Israel's restraint. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton said that it was extraordinary.

I admire and commend Israel's restraint. However, we should make it clear to Israel that we are glad but not grateful for that restraint. I draw that important distinction, because to be grateful implies that we are indebted to Israel. We are not indebted to Israel. We owe Israel no debt for that restraint. The Israelis are intelligent enough to appreciate that they have been restrained because their intervention would damage the western-Arab alliance, which would damage Israel's interests. Israel is acting with proper self-interest by being restrained.

I hope that the House will not misunderstand me. I am not attacking or criticising Israel; I am commending Israel for its restraint. We owe the Israelis no debt for their restraint because they are acting in their own self-interest. The moral which I would draw from those remarks is that we must have a United Nations-organised conference after the war concludes. Such a conference would help Israel as well as other nations.

It is also essential that we control the sale of arms worldwide. The Arab nations have a long, regrettable tradition of fighting among themselves. Those family quarrels are in danger of becoming a danger to the world if the participants are armed with weapons of mass destruction. To avoid a catastrophe, as distinct from this tragic war, we must not only limit but control the sale of arms to small but wealthy protagonists. It is a big order, but we must aspire to it.

Understandably, we have been preoccupied with preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. The non-proliferation measures are warmly welcomed, but in the past few days we have seen that the spread of remarkably sophisticated destructive weapons is almost as dangerous, in its cumulative effect, as nuclear weapons.

Two criteria have been associated with any country, however small, acquiring an arsenal to threaten world peace. The first criterion for acquiring that destructive arsenal has been that a country should be an enemy of an enemy of the United States. Those enemies of the enemies of the United States have been given sophisticated weapons by the United States, just as Iraq was given them. The other criterion is that a country should acquire great wealth, mainly through oil. That enables small nations to buy the means of threatening other countries, regardless of their size.

We must deal with this mad, inane system. Great wealth and technology make it possible for national minnows to challenge and threaten international whales. We must transform that system into something intelligent. How? If one thing emerges from this tragic war against Iraq, it must be that nations must demand a new order, under the auspices of the United Nations, to control the sale of major weapons.

During the past few days, the press has repeatedly used the word "Armageddon." It is not Armageddon yet, despite this tragic war, but unless the nations of the world prevent, rather than profit from, the sale of these remarkably destructive weapons—these weapons of death—Armageddon lies just round the corner. Either we control the sale of such weapons or the world perishes. The magnitude of the problem is no smaller and no greater than that.

5.50 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The House knows of my Royal Air Force interest and it will therefore come as no surprise to hon. Members to learn that much of what I have to say will concern the contribution made to the Gulf war by the Royal Air Force—the air crew, the ground crew and the senior staff directing. Some of those involved are personal friends, and I sent some on their first solo flights. In addition, like many other hon. Members, I have constituents serving in the Gulf.

I believe that the United Nations force is engaged in a just and honourable task. The future of the United Nations and of the rule of international law are in their hands, and I believe that they are in good hands. Politicians of all parties should demonstrate and declare their support for the British armed forces in their very difficult and dangerous task. Even if some hon. Members did not support the decision to commit our forces to battle, they must recognise that those forces are now in battle. The Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, as well as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, have clearly shown how they feel about the matter, and I hope that their leadership will be followed throughout the House.

The importance of aerial supremacy in reducing the number of casualties to the allied ground forces cannot be overstated. That aim has called for an allied air force composed of many different types of aircraft—aircraft with fixed and rotary wings, jet and propeller-driven aircraft. The aircraft cover many ranges and are engaged in many activities—reconnaissance, command and control, airborne early warning, strike, air supremacy, air defence, spotter aircraft activities, maritime patrol, air transport, in-flight refuelling, anti-submarine activities, close ground support and anti-tank activities.

The destruction of airfields, of enemy aircraft and radar, of early warning facilities, of command and communications facilities, of anti-aircraft facilities and of missile capability, both offensive and defensive—as well as of support capability—has been an essential first priority.

There must be no pause or we shall put at risk our own service men, not least the air service men who would then have to face Iraq's airborne capability. Do not let us forget that, although that capability is already dilapidated and depleted, it still exists in large part. A pause could give the Iraqis the opportunity to do what they could have done on day one had they been properly organised, which is to conduct an aerial battle producing ghastly casualties among the allied air forces.

The first few days of war have graphically demonstrated the awesome flexibility and destructive capability of modern weapons. We have seen the extent to which the forces have obeyed orders to avoid attacking civilian targets wherever possible. The first few days of war have also shown us how RAF and NATO air crews have benefited from many years of close co-operation and shared technology.

Low flying has been the cause of many complaints and a number of political campaigns, not least that conducted by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). I was pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman had to say the other day. His comments should be remembered by all. The hon. Gentleman believes that, now that our lads are committed, our support is called for. Operational low flying calls for continuous training and a special aptitude and attitude among the crews involved. Today's fast-jet pilot is not a modern Biggles. There is nothing gung-ho in the attitude of the modern fast-jet pilots or navigators. They constitute a special, highly skilled, professional aviation team. Not all fast-jet pilots and navigators are young: some are well over 30, some are in their 40s and at least one is in his early 50s.

We have seen on our television screens just how important it is that our pilots are capable of flying low and accurately—particularly over the Iraqi airfields. We have watched them dropping the JP233—at least, we have seen simulated versions of such operations. We know what the JP233 is capable of. What we cannot imagine is the risk to the crew of a Tornado in the final stages of such an operation. Tornados have to fly down the runway at low heights if they are to drop the weaponry accurately, and are thus exposed to all kinds of anti-aircraft capability. To do it once is demanding. To do it twice is very demanding. To do it continually over a period of days calls for a special kind of individual with a special kind of courage.

Anyone who has served operationally will know what it means when one's best friend does not return from a mission. Families also share in the grief. In hitherto unknown circumstances, the operations are reported on television as they happen. That involves a new kind of grief, which those in my generation certainly did not experience. Indeed, when my colleagues were lost in battle in the middle east, it was some weeks before anyone knew.

I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on the Front Bench. I realise that "Options for Change" was brought into being before this new high-technology war began and before we saw missiles being shot out of the sky by the Patriot missile. I hope, that in considering "Options for Change", we shall bear in mind the lessons of the present campaign. We should also bear in mind the future of the United Nations and what it may need to call upon us to do. We must recognise the instability of the Soviet Union and the possible threat that that may pose. The need for a European fighter aircraft will grow, rather than diminish, in the light of the recent experience. Air superiority has been shown graphically on our television screens in a way which we have never seen before, and the European fighter aircraft will have a special role to play in the future.

Let me come to a subject that is close to my heart. It will not surprise my hon. Friends to learn that I want to mention the reserve forces and the auxiliaries who are providing a service to the RAF. Throughout my time in Parliament, I have argued that we should be building up, rather than reducing, our reserves. Nothing can have been illustrated more clearly by recent events. Fast-jet pilots are better used sitting in fast jets than behind desks. Reserves can fulfil certain important roles in times of hostility. They can act as air crew replacements. They can carry out many other duties to release pilots at present employed in less onerous tasks for fast-jet activities. In specialist fields, they have much to contribute.

Hon. Members have mentioned media coverage. I will not be critical of the media. What I have seen of the coverage so far has been balanced, informative and in many ways educational. I have not always been a great friend of the BBC, but I have nothing but compliments for what I have seen of the BBC's coverage.

The media have educated the public about the region. I served in that part of the world and I know something about it, but most people do not know about it. The media

have also reminded people of the value that they receive from the taxpayers' money that goes towards the United Kingdom's armed forces. By Jove, if people do not think that we get good value, they do not have good judgment.

After the war it will be necessary to establish a stable environment throughout the middle east. Not for the first time in the adult lifetime of many hon. Members, the British armed forces are engaged in battle to preserve the rule of law and the integrity of a nation's borders. Not for the first time, the United Nations has attempted to provide the circumstances in which the international rule of law can be implemented in the middle east.

In 1948 the United Nations mediator, whom I met on a couple of occasions, attempted to provide a resolution to a similar problem. In those days I did not talk the political stuff that we talk today. I was one of those simple chaps present when the United Nations mediator'a aircraft landed at our airfield. By the way, I was sorry that that individual died. He attempted to resolve the problems arising from the creation of the state of Israel and the aftermath of the first Arab-Israeli war. Sadly, as we know, those efforts failed, and the middle east has been in political and armed turmoil ever since.

No matter what side of the divide one occupies in terms of attitudes towards peace in the middle east—there are pro-Arabs and pro-Israelis—I hope no one is anti-peace. The realistic view is that we must sit down after the war and find a permanent solution to the problems facing that unstable region. That will not be easy, but we will owe that to the young men and women who have given their lives this time and in earlier conflicts in attempts to ensure that the United Nations could become what the founding fathers hoped it would be, but has never been—a means of resolving problems between nation states, so removing the need for any nation state to go to war.

Those hopes, aspirations and wishes have been thwarted because of territorial interests and for other reasons. In this post-cold-war era, we have a unique opportunity. I can only hope that politicians of this generation are better at finding answers than were politicians of previous generations who failed the service men in the past and failed the families of those who died or were badly disabled and wounded. This is not the first time that this has happened, but I certainly hope that it will be the last.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation.

6.3 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that no hon. Member is anti-peace. I remind him and other hon. Members tonight we should be debating whether the House is for or against the war which is being waged in the name of the House at this very moment and in which thousands of lives have been lost. It does not really matter whether those lives have all been lost on one side; no life should be lost. I denounce the House for failing to afford hon. Members the opportunity to express clearly either their support for or their opposition to the war.

The Prime Minister said that on this occasion all hon. Members would be given an opportunity to express their views. I assume that he meant that those of us who hold the minority view in opposition to the war would be allowed to express their views as well. I have been fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but many other hon. Members have not been so fortunate, and they will not have an opportunity to speak. Their only opportunity to make clear their position on the war would have been to vote in the Lobby tonight.

The Government's motion, as amended by the official Opposition, denies those hon. Members the right to do that. Many hon. Members like me want to vote in support of our troops, but want also to vote in opposition to the waste of their lives in a war which we believe to be unnecessary. It is worse than regrettable that we have been denied that opportunity. That is a denial of democracy itself.

The fact that that is happening in the name of an institution that describes itself as the mother of Parliaments and the seat of democracy makes it even worse. Earlier, a Conservative Member said that he abhorred the lack of democracy in Baghdad. So do I, but I equally abhor the attempt to silence dissent that is taking place in this House tonight. There could and should have been more than one amendment for us to vote on tonight, and I deeply regret the fact that there is not.

Support for the British troops is nearly unanimous in the country, and it is unanimous in the House. There is nothing but admiration for the bravery of those prepared to put their lives on the line at the bidding of elected politicians. There will be nothing but support for them and their families during the days and possibly the weeks and months ahead, when all their waking hours will be haunted by the fear of death or serious injury.

All hon. Members pray for the safe and speedy return of our soldiers. However, as elected representatives, we have responsibilities other than the natural expression of support of that kind for our troops. I do not accept that, because a war is started, we must support it—the principle of "my country, right or wrong". That principle should not be applied indiscriminately, and it has never been supported by the Labour party. It is a matter of deep regret that some of my hon. Friends have tried to use that argument in our debates on the Gulf crisis.

Nor do I accept that, because a war is fought in pursuit of a cause that is just, it must therefore be supported. There are many just causes in this unjust world, not least the oppression of the Palestinians over the past 23 years or the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel, in defiance of United Nations resolutions over that period.

Fighting a war in pursuit of a just cause is a necessary condition for support of a war, but in itself it is not sufficient justification for supporting it. That point is worth making tonight. Before a war can be supported, it must be shown to have been necessary. We must be certain that the decision to send our troops to war was taken when there was no other alternative. I do not believe that that was the case. Not only could the war have been avoided —it should have been avoided.

I believe that the war can still be cut short and that a peaceful settlement can be reached on the condition that the United Nations Security Council is given a central role of influence in the conduct of the war. Hon. Members who have referred to the war as being about backing the authority of the United Nations should explain why the

[Mr. John McAllion]

war is being fought not under United Nations control, but under the control of the United States President and United States military.

I do not believe that it is unpatriotic or anti-British troops to hold those views and beliefs, or to give public expression to them. How can I express my beliefs at the end of the debate?

The motion and the amendment actually support the continuation of the war. The motion states:

"That this House expresses its full support for British troops in the Gulf and their contribution to the implementation of United Nations . . . Resolution 678."

That means support for the war that is now being waged. That is not my interpretation, it is the interpretation of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who told us that he believed that there was no doubt about the legitimacy of the military action that has been taken against Iraq. I disagree with him. I believe that there are serious doubts about the legitimacy of the military action that is currently being taken. I will not be prevented from voicing those doubts by anyone in this House.

Let us be clear what resolution 678 says. It does not authorise war—it merely calls on member nations to use all necessary means to ensure that Iraq leaves Kuwait. There are different interpretations of "all necessary means". Those of us who favoured sanctions being given more time to work did not and still do not believe that war is necessary at this stage. Those who supported the war never made the case that war was necessary before launching the war on Wednesday night. Indeed, the decision was taken by the United States President, and he did not even bother to inform the Secretary-General of the United Nations or arrange for the United Nations Security Council to be convened.

We went to war in the name of the United Nations, without even informing the United Nations that we were going to war. That is not a good enough foundation to support the sacrifice of thousands of human lives. I now face the stark alternative of voting for or against the motion or the amendment. That is not of my choosing. It is the result of choices that have already been made by both Front Benches and by Mr. Speaker. I bitterly regret that, but my position is clear. My support for the British troops is unqualified, but my opposition to their destruction in an unnecessary war is equally unqualified. That may be a minority view in the House, but I sincerely believe that it is the majority view in Scotland. In Scotland, the trade unions, the Churches, the peace movement and the people have made clear their opposition to an unnecessary war.

In a magnificent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said that she had been derided for taking a brave stand on peace, and that she had been accused of not supporting British troops. Hon. Members on both sides of the House were very quick to dissociate themselves from such condemnation, and rightly so. However, it would be naive to expect anything else from the gutter press in this country than precisely that denunciation of those who speak out against the war.

The essence of democracy is not only the tolerance of dissent but respect for dissent. Precisely that respect has been denied tonight because of the manoeuvring in respect of the motion and the amendments. Those who oppose the war have been treated with disrespect by the House. Others who are less fastidious than hon. Members will build on that disrespect and, in the days and weeks ahead, will begin the process that will bring about the denial of democracy. That should be of concern to hon. Members. Hon. Members have every right to hold views in support of the war and every right to express them in motions and amendments. However, they have no right whatsoever to deny that same right to myself and my hon. Friends. I shall vote against the motion, because I have no opportunity to do anything else. I shall vote against it because I support the troops and I oppose the waste of their lives in an unnecessary war.

6.13 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I rise with some trepidation because I never pretend that I am an expert on foreign affairs, nor have I ever professed to be an expert on defence affairs. In fact, I know very little about the middle east, so I suppose that I am speaking very much as the—*[Interruption.]* It might make a refreshing change to hear from somebody who does not pretend to be an expert. *[Interruption.]* It might mean that I am uniquely well qualified. Therefore, I cannot speak with the authority of certain right hon. and hon. Members.

I suppose that I am one of the lucky ones. I was too young for the previous war—that may surprise some people—and I am too old for this one. It may surprise people that I was still at school in 1945, when the war ended. When I left school in 1946, I went straight into the Navy to do my national service. That, perhaps, was not the most dazzling part of my career, because I basked under the title of PEM. When I came home on leave one weekend, the doctor came round on a social call—in fact, he came round for a drink—and asked my mother how I was doing. She proudly said that I was a PEM. The doctor said, "Pardon my ignorance, but what it does 'PEM' stand for?" My poor mother said, "Well, I am not sure." She shouted up to me, still languishing in bed, "What does 'PEM' stand for?" I shouted back, "Probationary electrician's mate." My mother never boasted about me again.

No Member in his or her right mind wants war. I must admit that I was rather perplexed by the performance of Miss Emma Thompson, who is apparently an actress, or, as Mr. Paul Johnson referred to her in today's *Daily Mail*, a showbizibody. There she was, wearing her heart on her sleeve, saying how necessary it was that our boys came back safely. We all want that. People should remember that people gave their lives in the 1939-45 war to give her the right of free speech and the right to demonstrate against war.

That is one of our great assets. We can say what we believe and get away with our views, no matter how unacceptable or unpalatable they are to other people. I have not noticed any anti-war demonstrations taking place in Iraq. I wonder why. Could it be that Saddam Hussein would not permit them?

Never has a war been entered into more reluctantly than this one. The international community has leaned over backwards, ever since 2 August, in an attempt to avoid conflict. We have pleaded with Saddam Hussein to get out of Kuwait, but that has had no effect. Sanctions have been tried. Some hon. Members believe that sanctions should have been given more time to work. That is the theme of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member

for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I disagree with him. I am afraid that I cannot accept what he says. If Saddam Hussein was not put off by the prospect of force being used against his country, with all that that would have entailed, can we honestly believe that a few more months of sanctions would have persuaded him to get out of Kuwait? Last Tuesday, the House overwhelmingly approved the Government's actions.

Tribute should be paid to the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats. They have been extremely supportive and have presented a united front. That is extremely commendable. I approved both their speeches this afternoon—they were excellent. I pay tribute also to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Within weeks of taking over a tremendously important office, he has faced this crisis. He has earned the admiration of the overwhelming majority of people in this country for his coolness, his lack of histrionics and, above all, his determination.

It is not so long ago that cynics in this country were saying that the ties between the United Kingdom and the United States were not strong, that the great rapport between my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and President Reagan had gone, and that President Bush and the Americans were much more interested in getting on to better terms with Germany and France. The crisis has certainly settled that issue.

An editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* of Friday 18 January states:

"Britain has played a major role in this remarkable exercise in international peace-making. That raises a question: does this willingness to assert itself in a crisis suggest that Britain, not Germany, is the more natural leader for a Europe aspiring to greater political unity?"

It went on:

"Which country is best suited to take the leadership in a European foreign policy? Germany has wealth, but for historic and geographic reasons is reluctant to broaden its military role. France has the desire, but also a long record of contrariness towards the positions of others in the NATO alliance. Britain's performance against Saddam certainly heightens its stature."

It is obvious that there is a great rapport between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Bush. I think it is marvellous how, in this country, the right person always seems to come along at the right time. In the last war, we had Sir Winston Churchill. In 1981, at the time of the Falklands, we had my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Lady Thatcher). I noticed when she came into the House last week there were snide comments of, "Rejoice, rejoice," from hon. Members opposite. No doubt what they were getting at was the fact that my right hon. Friend used those words at the time of the capture of South Georgia. What they neglected to remember was that she was telling us to rejoice because no lives had been lost as a consequence of the capture of South Georgia. Now, in 1991, we have my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has inspired great confidence with his handling of the present crisis.

I hope that those who oppose the war will note the difference between the tactics being used by the two sides. The allies are taking infinite care to pinpoint military installations and avoid residential areas, whereas Saddam Hussein has made an unprovoked attack by missiles on Israel, deliberately aimed at centres of population. I believe that Israel has shown great restraint, because the aim of Saddam Hussein has been to try to force that country into retaliation, in the hope that that will split the allied forces and that Syria and Egypt will change sides.

Had Israel responded, it would have fallen into a trap that was deliberately set for it by this evil man. I believe that the allies must retaliate on behalf of the Israelis by seeking out those centres from which the Scud missiles are being launched and destroying them.

I ask those who oppose military action how they would deal with this man. If any country should have learnt that appeasement does not pay, it is this country. We should have learnt the lessons of the 1930s. Had we not acted on the United Nations Security Council resolution 678, Saddam Hussein would have believed that he had got away with it. Then it would only have been a matter of time before we had to face up to this man.

Of course, this man is cunning. He is now saying that the invasion of Kuwait was all part of his aim to settle the Palestinian problem. But I remind the House that there was no mention of the Palestine problem when he invaded Kuwait in August. At that time, the invasion of Kuwait was to glorify Saddam Hussein, and to suggest that Kuwait was part of Iraq and the Iraqis were taking only what was rightfully theirs.

Of course the Palestinian problem is important, and once Saddam Hussein has withdrawn from Kuwait, I hope that there will be a peace conference that will deal with the underlying problems of the Middle East. If only this man would get out of Kuwait, there would be no loss of life among civilians anywhere; there would be no loss of life among military personnel on both sides of the conflict, and all further bloodshed would be prevented. If he would leave Kuwait, even at this late stage, we could have peace in the area.

Until Saddam Hussein leaves Kuwait, I believe that the allies are quite right to continue their attacks on Iraq's military machine. The aim should be to do maximum damage there in order to lessen the loss of life if the conflict continues for any length of time. I hope that the war will be over quickly and that casualities will be kept to a minimum. As the Prime Minister said today, this is a just war, and right is on our side.

I despair for the unfortunate prisoners or war in Iraqi hands. These men have been paraded on television and forced to make statements—obviously under great duress—which I am sure they do not believe for one minute. I agree with the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) who made a plea to the press to leave the relatives of these men alone, because they must be going through a period of great strain and anxiety. The behaviour of the Iraqis is totally at variance with the Geneva convention, and that fact should be brought home to everyone in this country.

6.24 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am very glad to have a few minutes to endorse the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I, too, regret very much that this House of Commons, the mother of Parliaments, has somehow not found it possible to permit a vote which will reflect all the expressions of opinion on this matter. It is not just a problem for individuals who oppose the war and wish to vote accordingly: it also affects those people we represent, particularly in Scotland, who wish to have

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

that vote recorded in the House of Commons. This is an injustice which does nothing at all for the reputation of this Parliament. We are right to condemn the lack of democracy in some other regimes, but in doing so, it would be more fitting if we upheld standards of democracy ourselves. That will not happen in this House of Commons tonight.

Since I voted last Tuesday night, I have had more than 100 letters from people in Scotland, and all but two of them have supported the anti-war position I expressed a week ago. Many colleagues have had the same experience. There have been many anti-war demonstrations in Glasgow. None of these people supports Saddam Hussein and none believes that he should get away with his aggression.

A typical comment that I have heard is, "Who do these people think they're kidding? Do they think we are unaware that Hussein is a ruthless dictator? Do they think we are unaware of the torture that he has inflicted on his own people, particularly the Kurds? Of course not." However, they feel that selective indignation is being expressed here in the House of Commons.

The United States, which has been acting as the policeman of the world, has suddenly discovered a conscience, but in the past it has ignored United Nations resolutions and even rulings of the International Court in the Hague when it came to the question of Nicaragua. It actually supported an extreme right-wing group in order to bring down a democratically elected Government. The United States continually aided and abetted this right-wing group, totally ignoring the cruelty, the violations of justice, the mass disappearances and murders. That sort of thing has happened in other areas across the globe—it is not a new story. We are all aware of such things.

When it comes for standing up for justice, many of us on this side of the House have been trying to stand up for justice and human rights for many years. However, there are people in this House who even went so far as to invite the Contras leader to their party conference in Brighton not so long ago. Suddenly they have discovered that they care about killings, mutilations and all the rest of it. By heavens, I have heard much hypocrisy in my time in politics, but nothing to beat what I have been hearing in this House lately.

It is absolutely vital that we address ourselves to the question of how to end this war. I was opposed to starting it. I am still convinced that sanctions could have been made to work. I ask myself how it is that, in the name of the United Nations, only a tiny minority of countries are at war. The vast majority of United Nations members, who always pay their dues, are not actually at war. Are we to conclude that those nations support Saddam Hussein? Of course they do not, but their efforts have been ignored.

The United Nations should be in permanent session working on every possible way to stop the conflict and bring justice to the Middle East. I simply cannot understand the thought processes of anyone who would disagree with that proposition. It seems incredible that, in order to avenge the invasion of Kuwait, we should kill and maim innocent Iraqis who did not vote for Saddam Hussein and who deplore what is going on but have no say in it. How does it help the relatives of people who have been killed in Kuwait if we murder Iraqis? That point of view is one that I simply cannot accept, and I have yet to hear any justification for it.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): When I was very much younger and studied the 1930s, I always found it remarkable that we as a nation seemed unable to learn our lessons. If we allow a dictator who wants to embark on conquest to achieve his aim, in the end we will pay dearly for it. I found it difficult, looking at that period, to understand how men and women of good will and repute, who had served their country well in the first world war, could have believed that somebody else's country, somebody else's principles, and somebody else's interests should be sacrificed in the mistaken belief that that would prevent the horrors of war. Tragically, events not only proved them wrong, but made necessary great sacrifices by the people of this country and by those whose interests were threatened during the 1930s.

Over the past few weeks, we have had a replay of some of the arguments made then. Kuwait in the 1990s has been put in much the same position as Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. Distinguished right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who served their country bravely in the second world war seem not to have learnt the lessons of the sacrifices made not only by them but by many of their friends. I am glad to say that this lesson has been learnt by the Government and by most Labour Members and Social Democrat Members as well. The country has learnt it. Ordinary people, with great quietness but determination, are supporting what is being done in their name by the forces in the sand of Saudi Arabia.

The events of the second world war and the sacrifices that had to be made proved to be essential not just to defeat Hitler and all he stood for, but to secure for the continent of Europe the long-term peace and security to which we can now look forward. In the same way, sadly, the sacrifices that are being made by young men and women in the Gulf have proved necessary to lay the foundations for the future peace and security of what is now the cauldron of the middle east.

Those who take an interest in these matters will know that many call on the state of Israel not just to sit down and negotiate with its Arab neighbours, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and those members of it who advocate violence but to take a gamble with its very existence as a nation state. Such people must now understand that, if ever that is to happen, if ever Israel is to sign a treaty with its Arab neighbours, and if ever peace rather than war is to be the norm for the region, Israel must have the certain knowledge that it is secure, that its people are safe from bombardment and attack and that, above all, if any treaty comes about—we all hope that it will—the nations of the world will not stand idly by if that treaty is breached or broken. That is the lesson of today's events.

To call, as some do, for a middle east peace conference while condemning the United Nations and the forces in the Gulf is both short-sighted and illogical. If the community of nations were to fail to reverse, if necessary by force, Iraqi aggression against Kuwait—a fellow Arab country with great oil wealth and great economic force—such a failure would send a clear message to all the states in the middle east, including Israel. That message would be,

"Rely on yourselves, do not listen to what the world says, depend on your armies and resources." What hope would there be for those nations and for the state of Israel for years to come?

In the hearts and homes of all our constituents there is a great and understandable anxiety, even fear, and my constituents are no exception to that. Many have sons serving in the third battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, once known as the Lancashire Fusiliers, the courage of which is still remembered in Bury every April at the annual Gallipoli service. Many others have sons serving in other branches of the armed forces. I salute their courage and that of the relatives and friends who wait anxiously at home for news.

My constituency will also have some anxious hearts within its considerable Jewish community. Many in that community have family or friends living in Israel, many in or near Tel Aviv, where those awful missiles came down. They know that, of all the countries in the world not involved in that conflict, Israel is the only one whose citizens daily face a threat to their lives, as they sit in their sealed rooms waiting, irony of ironies, for a gas attack. I pay tribute to the Government and people of Israel. They have been much maligned and criticised in the House, but their restraint, reserve and containment have proved that they can play a valuable part in world affairs.

All my constituents, whether serving in the Gulf, whether having sons or daughters who are in danger there or in Israel, whether sitting, as most of us do, watching the events unfold on television will, I am sure, hope and pray that our victory will come swiftly and surely. Without doubt, all our fates depend on that.

6.36 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I was one of the small group of Members from both Houses who had the privilege, at the end of November, of visiting British forces in the Gulf. All who took part in the visit were extremely impressed by the morale and professionalism of the forces we saw. If I may be forgiven a brief domestic reference, I pay tribute to the skill of the staff of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwich, whom I met in Bahrain before their departure to Saudi Arabia. When I met them, they were busy training but were seriously short of patients. I hope that they stay that way throughout this conflict.

Those of us with any connection with the armed forces are never surprised by their professionalism, but, like other hon. Members, I feel that we should make special mention of the crews of the Tornados and the Jaguars, and particularly those who have been flying a few feet above the ground in pitch darkness, experiencing for the first time real anti-aircraft fire and surface-to-air missiles. As other hon. Members have said, the people who do that display a special sort of courage, at which the rest of us can only wonder.

I take the view that there was no alternative to the use of force to secure the implementation of the United Nations resolution. We are entitled to some quiet satisfaction about a number of developments. First, the coalition has stood up to the test. Despite the speculation and the cynical attempts to break it up, it is there, and some would argue that it is a little firmer than it was this time last week. There was some doubt about the French. There were uncertainties in Paris and there has been some wobbling, but the French are now firmly on board and that is most satisfactory for the alliance.

Also, we should be pleased about the degree of public support for this military action. I recognise that a minority of sincere people think that it is totally wrong. They express their point of view, and long may they do so, but the majority of people in this country believe that what is being done, unpleasant though it is, is necessary. That there is so obviously a determination to limit the number of civilian casualties goes some way to explain the fact that there is such a substantial degree of public support for this military action.

There must be a great deal of relief that the high-technology weapon systems have on the whole worked extremely well. There is always some doubt whether a sophisticated system which works in trials and in exercises will work when it is put to the acid test of a genuine battle. When we have seen the operation of electronic warfare systems suppressing Iraqi radars, as well as extraordinary pictures of smart weapons finding their way into buildings through air vents, when we have heard descriptions of cruise missiles flying along streets in Baghdad and turning corners to find their targets, we must feel a considerable sense of satisfaction that high technology has worked—not only because of the military advantages, but because that sophisticated technology has limited the number of civilian casualties.

We should also say a word of thanks about the patience of allied commanders. Clearly they are determined not to commit ground troops until the threats facing them have been substantially reduced. That must be the right strategy. Finally, we should express some satisfaction that the political leaders have not got themselves involved in the day-to-day operations of the war. They have laid down the objectives and very clear ground rules. From there on, it is a matter for the military commanders, and that is a subject of satisfaction.

I am a little less happy about media coverage. There seems to be some strain between the British media and the Ministry of Defence. I understand that military needs have to come first; this conflict has not been put on for the benefit of the media. But there is clearly a limited amount of hard news being provided. As a result, I suggest that far too much media attention is being concentrated on what may be dramatic television pictures of Scud attacks which are totally ineffective in military terms. We are devoting time and attention to them when, apparently, we are ignoring the steady and continuous allied air offensive which will have a very important effect on the conduct of this war. I hope that there will be some improvement in the relations between the Ministry of Defence and our media.

I wish now to deal with the basic issue of middle east security in the future. We all would agree that, unless the Arab-Israeli dispute is resolved, there is considerable risk that these problems will simply recur and recur. It would be futile to go through the present agony and then to walk away and ignore the source of the instability in the region, the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I can say, as others have declared their position, that I have been a supporter of the Palestinian cause since the late 1960s, when it was not as fashionable to be a supporter of Palestinians as it is today. I have no doubt that, over the years, the Palestinians have suffered grave injustices, but the suggestion that the entire Arab nation has been somehow united behind the Palestinians is absolute and

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total nonsense. The Palestinians have been used by other Arab nations for national self-interest, picked up and dropped when it has suited Arab nations. Saddam Hussein's cynical exploitation of the Palestinian cause is only the most recent example of that trend. Indeed, Arab Governments have not hesitated to use military force against the Palestinians when it has served their national interest. One thinks of Jordan and Syria as obvious examples.

Against that background, we should not be surprised about the Palestinians' frustration. We should not be surprised that the Palestinians will turn to anyone who seems to be able to offer them a way forward when the rest of the world can be portrayed as having forgotten the fact that the Palestinians exist, that they have a cause and that they have rights.

I argue that the Israeli policies over the years have aggravated their own internal problems. The insensitivity of their policing of the occupied territories has built up massive resentment. Their apparent belief that military might solves all problems has won them few friends in the region. But, most of all, the continued establishment of Jewish settlements on Arab lands on the West Bank has added to the despair, frustration and rage of the Palestinians. That is a matter we must recognise.

But I have to accept, too, that Israel has a right to exist. We have to face the fact that there is this need to meet Palestinian aspirations for a homeland—as justified an aspiration as that of any other people on the face of the earth—but those aspirations have to be matched by Israeli rights to security within their own borders. That will be an extremely difficult problem to resolve, as other hon. Members have said.

I understand the case for a peace conference, but that is only a mechanism. It is not a magic solution to the problem. We shall not see a resolution of the situation without, in my view, dramatic concessions by Israel. It is not easy to see those concessions happening. If we are to see them happen, it will require substantial and credible guarantees being given to Israel by the super powers.

One of the problems about the recent events is that they have substantially undermined the position of moderates in Israel—those who do not take the extremist Zionist position, those who are willing to negotiate with the Palestinians. The apparent involvement of Palestinians in the original invasion of Kuwait, the fact that some elements in the Palestine Liberation Organisation have lined up beside Iraq—none of that will make it easier for moderate Israeli opinion to move towards the Palestinians. It will need clear and credible guarantees to Israel if it is to move in that direction. The one glimmer of hope, after the success of the coalition, is that we may now find it just that little bit easier to give those guarantees in a way in which they might be believed.

As I said, I visited the Gulf in November and was impressed by the morale of our service men and service women. More than that, I was impressed by their understanding of the issues at stake. They knew why they were there. They were not looking forward to war, but they believed that what they were doing was both right and necessary. I suggest that such a belief in the justice of the cause goes a long way to explain the dedication and the courage that our service men and service women are now displaying. They deserve our full and wholehearted support.

6.47 pm

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) said—particularly his point about the importance of the relationship between the Ministry of Defence and the press, of which I hope my colleagues will take particular note.

I have not spoken in any of the debates in this crisis, but I have attended them virtually totally throughout. I have been proud to have been a servant of this House since I first joined it in 1955, but never more so since last September. The manner in which the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have conducted themselves and have risen to this crisis, not least in their sensitive treatment of this House and public opinion at home and abroad, is beyond all praise. But also, as a House of Commons man, I have been profoundly impressed by the contribution of the Opposition Front Bench—not least by that of the Leader of the Opposition and also of the leader of the Liberal Democratic party.

I have been impressed by the burning sincerity of those hon. Members who oppose what the Government are doing and who oppose the majority feeling in this House and outside. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said that she had been derided for her attitude, but I can assure her that nobody in this House or in our democracy who stands up for what they believe in will ever be or should ever be derided.

I include very much in that my hon. Friend, as I call him deliberately, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), who is one of the finest and most honourable Members of this House. He takes an opposite view from that of the Government, and indeed an opposite view from that which I take. I have never accepted the view that is held by one or two people on this side, that the Conservative party has the prerogative of patriotism, because I know that is nonsense.

In and around Cambridge, there are many anxious service families, both British and American. There is no anti-Americanism in East Anglia. We shall never forget the young men who came to our cause during the second world war. So many of them are buried or commemorated in the American war cemetery in Cambridge. Recently, thanks to a special Act of Congress, a cemetery was reopened especially for a young American who was killed in the Gulf. That was much appreciated by his British widow and British parents-in-law, who are my constituents.

Service families are proud of their men and of their confidence in their equipment and their commanders. They are, of course, anxious for their men. As a member of a service family that has been through wars, I know how they feel. Until they were abolished, I dreaded the arrival of a telegram. For a service family in the second world war, a telegram was invariably bad news. Waiting for news at any time in such circumstances is a grim business, and one which I remember only too well.

I remember also what it was like to be bombed and, on one occasion, machine-gunned. These experiences gave me a great hatred of war. They did not make me a pacifist, but

they were one of the factors that led me to work for the United Nations for several years. That was a cause in which I believed and in which I continue to believe.

My father was a professional soldier. He took his platoon into the first winter of the first world war and was severely wounded. Curiously enough, after he had recovered he won his fame, glory, promotion and medals in exactly the area in which the Gulf war is taking place. He was an opponent of the Munich betrayal of 1938. That is my first political memory, at the age of five years.

My father was a fine and brave soldier, who lost many of his friends and contemporaries. He had, however, an intense hatred of war, knowing it to be foul, bloody and terrible. Having spent his childhood in Germany, he was in no way anti-German. In fact, he spoke the language fluently and loved German culture and music. He recognised, however, that sooner or later Hitler, an avaricious tyrant, had to be stopped. My father believed, I am sure rightly, in 1938 that Hitler should be stopped sooner rather than later.

I accept entirely that there are no exact historical analogies, but I am bound to say that, over the past five and a half months, I have reflected very much on my experience and on my father's advice and views. He as a soldier, and my brothers as soldiers, were aware of the price that would have to be paid if war occurred. Looking back over the past five and a half months, I cannot think what more our Government, the American Government, the European Community, our allies, our Arab friends and the United Nations could have done to prevent the Gulf war. That is extremely important for our service families. I believe that there was nothing more to be done beyond surrender that could have been done in the past five and a half months. I think that the majority of our people, including our service men, know that.

The House knows of my association with Israel, a country of which my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) has spoken movingly. I do not always agree with the present Israeli Government. Indeed, I have come often to regard them as an irritating but candid friend, which we all dislike having. I am bound to say, however, that over the past few days I have never been more proud of my Israeli friends. With my many Israeli contacts—they are not only political or ministerial—I have done whatever has been possible to urge restraint, while recognising, as do the Government and other Governments, what I would feel if rockets fell upon my constituency. That is something about which hon. Members should think carefully. It is all very well for us sitting safely in this place. Let us think what it would be like and of the political pressures that would be placed upon us if that which has happened in Israel were happening to us.

The Israeli Government and people have shown an example of statesmanship, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, as well as one of political and physical courage. For that I salute them, honour them and thank them. I am sure that, in the long run, given the response of the other Arab members of the coalition, Israel will have gained a new stature and respect, not least in the middle east. So perhaps good will come out of evil.

I say sincerely that I am proud once again to be British. We are a peace-loving people, perhaps on occasion excessively so. We are also a people of courage and of principle. A great principle is at stake, and the British people well know that. They know that our cause is a just one. Those who wish us ill or consider that we are of little account have not read our history and do not understand our admittedly complicated national character.

I believe that our history and character was admirably summarised in 1940 by Dorothy L. Sayers in a deeply moving poem entitled "The English War". It ended as follows:

> "Please God, give us an English peace,
> But if another tyrant comes
> Then we shall fight again."

I believe that that says it all, and that is all that I wish to say.

6.58 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): During the lunchtime BBC news, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) said that anyone who voted against the motion was not fit to be a Member of this place. I shall explain why I shall be voting against the motion, along with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Those of us who vote in that way will not do so because we are against British troops. We are not in favour of any injury or ill coming to any of the women or men who serve in the Army or in the other services in the Gulf. We are not against British troops, but we are against the Government's policy of sending our troops to the Gulf and committing them to a war in which, tragically, many hundreds, if not thousands, of them will lay down their lives.

Conversely, we do not support the Iraqi regime—something which Conservatives Members may try to imply. In May 1989, 90 Opposition Members tabled a motion urging the Government not to give any money to British Aerospace, GEC, Racal and other firms that wanted to be present at an arms fair in Baghdad and to sell arms to Saddam Hussein. Not one Tory Member signed the motion. So a few Opposition Members have tried to undercut support from Britain and other countries to the despotic regime of Iraq, and we tried to do so for quite a few years.

Perhaps the Republican Guards division is feared because its officers were trained at Sandhurst. Iraqi pilots were trained in Britain. Companies in Coventry have supplied equipment over the past couple of years which has gone to help the war effort of Iraq. When it came to dealing with the Kurds within the boundaries of Iraq, at Halabja, and in the marshes north of Basra, during 1988, terrible chemical weapons were used. The Secretary of State for Health, as he now is, told the House in October 1988 that the Government disapproved of that. Nine days later, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced an extra £440 million worth of credits to British companies to build up trade with Iraq. When hands are supposedly clean or otherwise in that sort of business, it is those on the Government side of the House who should examine their consciences when considering whom they have supported.

One thing has worried me during the past few days. Like many other people, I have stayed up till the early hours to see what has been happening. I have seen press conferences in which American generals and the American media have treated the events of the last five days as though they were a cross between an American football match and a video arcade—the Scuds versus the Patriots. One almost feels that the next thing to come on will be a

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"bomb of the day" competition, so often does one see replays of videos showing bombs going through front doors or down air shafts. It is unreal——

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): It is pathetic.

Mr. Nellist: The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) says that it is pathetic. What discussion has there been on the effects of those bombs so that decisions taken here tonight or decisions taken in the country might be based on reality? Let me tell the House where they may be found. They may be found buried in page 14 of the *Sunday Times* of yesterday, which quotes Pentagon experts as having said that, within the first 36 hours, about 20,000 tonnes of high explosive were dropped on Baghdad and other towns and that it is estimated that between 100,000 and 250,000 people will lose their lives or be severely injured, suffering internal bleeding as a result of concussive forces. When have television programmes presented that sort of discussion? It is usually only after 2 o'clock in the morning that Bruce Kent or Air Commodore Alistair Mackie appear.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nellist: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have only 10 minutes. I cannot give way.

This is unreal. The war in the middle east is not clean and clinical. The reality is that it is a horrible experience for many—and not just for civilians. Iraq's large army consists mainly of conscripts. If they do not serve they are hanged. I draw little distinction between Iraq's armed forces and its civilians when deciding whether our compassion is justified. Perhaps the *Sunday Times* article to which I referred may be false, but it is hard to believe that Murdoch would purposely do something to help the Iraqi regime. But if it is true it should have been on the front page so that everybody could have seen and discussed it.

If it were not so sick, it would be ironic to think that people whose relatives have been tortured, murdered, and imprisoned by that regime could be "liberated" in 36 hours by the use of more than 20,000 tonnes of high explosive, causing death and disfigurement.

Soon the land battle will begin, and I believe that casualties of that order will occur on the side of the allies. We are told that it will be the biggest land battle since 1943. The Government are prepared for it. They are requisitioning 7,500 national health service beds to supplement the 11,000 military beds. If that is a real reflection of the expected level of casualties—the Secretary of State for Defence and others have never answered my direct questions on this matter—it means that for every two soldiers in the Gulf one is expected to suffer some sort of injury: 18,500 beds and 36,000 personnel.

Why are we not reopening some of the 10,000 national health service beds that have been closed in the past four or five years? Why, instead, are we having an auction, a competition between civilian patients and possible military casualties? Already in some parts of the country people's back and hip operations have been postponed indefinitely so that beds may be made available for military casualties.

We have been told that this debate is about supporting the troops. The best way to support the British troops would be to vote against the motion and to bring them home as soon as possible to avoid loss of life and disfigurement.

This is supposed to be a war for democracy—a war arising from annexation and colonisation of another country. Why then did not the Government demand or take action when Turkey went into Cyprus, Israel went into Lebanon, Syria went into Lebanon, China went into Tibet and the Soviet Union went into the Baltic states? Why did not they take action about Indonesia's killing of one third of the entire population of East Timor—200,000 people out of 700,000—over the past 15 years?

What is the answer? The answer came from a former American Secretary for Defence, Lawrence Korb, when he said that it was all about the great powers looking after their interests. He said, "If Kuwait grew carrots, we would not give a damn." It is about oil; it is not about genuine democratic rights.

The Government talk about having the legitimate Government of Kuwait restored. Last week, the *New York Times* quoted someone as having said that the Emir, once back in his palace, would still be a dictator. Who had that insight? It was Richard Nixon. He should know all about dictators—he propped up many of them in Latin America and in other parts of the world. Are thousands of young men and women to die for an Emir who abolished his own Parliament four years ago and who never allowed women to have the vote? Indeed, only 8 per cent. of men in Kuwait who can trace their ancestry to the period before 1920 had the vote.

Is it democracy that is being defended in Saudi Arabia, a country where people have their hands cut off for shoplifting, where political parties and elections are forbidden? How many mothers in this country want their sons to die on the sands of Saudi Arabia, a country that does not even allow women to drive cars? Outside the pre-1967 boundaries of Israel—indeed, even within those boundaries the Arabs do not have many rights—not one of those countries has democracy as we understand it.

Every one of them bans trade unions and political parties. They execute—*[Interruption.]* It is absolutely true, as is borne out by publications like *The Economist* and Amnesty International reports, from which the Government like to quote. What happens in the Emirates, in Yemen, in Jordan and in Syria, where, under our "friend", 20,000 Muslims were murdered eight years ago in the city of Homs and where the bombers of Lockerbie remain today? That is the country with which we have just restored diplomatic links. Those countries are not democracies; they are not regimes for which our young men and women should die.

I am conscious of the time limit, but there are two more points that I want to make. Why should not the cost of this war be a matter for discussion? By last Wednesday, this country had spent £900 million on it. Every day, America spends $500 million on bombs and on Tomahawk cruise missiles. Last week, the United States congressional budget office—not a left-wing organisation—admitted that, at the end of the war, the cost to America could be $86 billion. That is more than the gross annual income of over four fifths of the countries of the world. It is twice the annual income of New Zealand or Portugal, and three times the annual income of Ireland. It is six times the aid that was given to sub-Saharan Africa last year. With that

sort of money, we could remove all famine and disease in the world. But, of course, that is not important in these schemes.

When the war was launched, one of the tabloid newspapers carried a headline about a 17-year-old boy —a boy not old enough to vote or to be a Member of this House—making his will before being sent to the Gulf by the Government. Let us not allow the young men and women of this country to die for oil or for America's strategic interests. Bring back the troops.

7.8 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): My greatest sympathy goes to the people of Kuwait, who have suffered at the tyrannical hands of Saddam Hussein—to those who have lost their lives or been tortured, and to the women who have been raped. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) should reflect on that.

I listened with the keenest interest to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James). I have great sympathy with what he said. He has experienced war, as I did at the time of Suez. I detest war every bit as much as does the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East. I also detest the failure of politicians and of intelligence to resolve differences and thus avoid war.

However, when one reaches the point at which there is no turning back, and when one knows that right and justice are on one's side, one must support the troops in the forefront of battle. They have my fullest support. Indeed, I should be with them if I were to be called. I am a reservist; if I were called up I would go and join them, and should be glad to do so.

Many tributes have been paid to our service men. I add my tribute to them for their skill, their courage and their daring. That goes also for the forces of the United States. The way in which the forces have worked together has been quite remarkable, as has been their conduct in this war. Nor do I want to forget the Saudi Arabian forces and the others that are taking part. I believe that they match our own people in efficiency and calibre.

I have always regarded that efficiency as based upon back-up. I pay tribute to the men and women—the civil servants—of the Ministry of Defence, because it is they and others involved in various organisations, in research and in the dockyards and elsewhere, who have made it possible for our troops to fight.

I have always taken the view that this would not be a short war which would be over in weeks, if not days. I believe that it will be a long war, but I hope that it will last in terms of months rather than years. Undoubtedly, if the war continues for a number of months—I fear that it shall —we must, as the Prime Minister has already said today, brace ourselves for the losses that will occur. In common with all hon. Members, I am so thankful that the number of casualties have been so few. Again, that is a tribute to the way in which the weapons have been targeted and the skill with which the service men have directed those weapons. Each and every casualty is, to all of us, a son. The families who must sustain themselves with a great deal of courage at this time deserve and get our fullest support.

The level of support in this country—I understand that research has shown that it is about 80 per cent. of the population—is in no small measure due to the leadership, honesty, integrity and sincerity with which the Prime Minister has expressed his views in our debates and on television. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have also shown a wonderful sense of clarity, sincerity and honesty when answering questions from the press and presenting the facts to the people.

If there is a longish war, I have no doubt that reservists will be called up—some already have been. There is a feeling in the country, however, that not all reservists are quite so keen to serve. Obviously, they have commitments that make it difficult for them to leave and we recognise that. I do not doubt for one moment, however, that reservists will respond with pride and will render the services for which they have been trained.

I would not want there to be any inclination in the country to suggest that our reservists are not willing and able to be called up should that need arise. I hope that companies and organisations will keep places open for their employees who are called up and will also make up the shortfall, if there is any, between the service pay that they will receive and their present pay. I hope that that message is taken on board by the affected companies.

There are two purposes behind the debate. First, it will reassure our service men in the Gulf—if that were necessary. I am not at all convinced that the speech of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East would give any reassurance to our service men. We have had two debates on the Gulf and if one loses the argument, as has happened to those who want our forces brought home, one has a duty to support our service men out in the Gulf. One cannot ignore the fact that they rely on full-hearted support for the decisions taken. I hope that there will be no vote tonight. The speech of the Leader of the Opposition was excellent and he said what a lot of us feel, particularly about the motion that has been tabled.

Secondly, the debate should also reaffirm the cohesion of the alliance of nations taking part in the war. Reference has already been made in the debate to the Scud attacks on Israel and we know that those attacks were purely and simply an attempt to provoke Israel into hostilities. If that had happened, Israel would have done exactly what the Iraqi President wanted. I am full of admiration for the maturity of statesmanship of the Israeli Government in withholding retaliation. Their position is greatly respected and we understand how difficult it must be for them, given the provocation they have suffered.

Turkey has a border with Iraq and I admire Turkey for her resolve. I ask my Front-Bench colleagues to do all they can to sustain Turkey's defences. The Turkish economy has been gravely affected by the costs with which it is now involved—I do not believe that those costs are disputed. I hope that we shall do all that we can to play our part in securing economic help to Turkey, which is already labouring under huge economic problems due to inflation. That country has guts and has shown it in the way in which it has resolved to stand firm against Iraq should it invade.

The debate has taken a constructive turn in that it has considered what will happen after the war, which is right. I would not dispute anything that has been said about how we are to achieve a new order in the middle east. However, it will be up to the Arab countries to reassess their relationships and to work to achieve a lasting peace. I certainly agree with those who argue that the war is a consequence of too many arms in the possession of one

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country. We have learnt that lesson before, but we are now learning it again to our cost. We must put our minds to that problem when peace has been proclaimed.

At the end of the day, this action is entirely right, because it gives strength to the United Nations. This is one occasion when war is being conducted in response to UN directions and resolutions. By giving strength to those resolutions, we can look forward to a greater and stronger UN role in the future. If nothing else, that is what we need to achieve when settling the problems in the middle east.

7.16 pm

Mr. Robert N.Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It is extremely sad that economic sanctions were not allowed to operate for longer—not only because that would have saved human lives, but because it was an opportunity for the UN to prove that there were circumstances when, if the world community so willed, sanctions could be made to work.

The inevitability of war against Saddam Hussein has, however, always been at the back of my mind. We are dealing with a vile dictator who cares nothing about the hardship of his people and who has already proved that he was ready to turn chemical warfare against his people in Kurdistan. I lived in Liverpool during the second world war, and I learned then that weakness was not the way to deal with a dictator, that one had to stand up to him. For that reason, I shall support the Opposition amendment tonight, because we must show our armed forces that we support their valour, as it is that which will contribute to the defeat of the vile dictator in Iraq.

It was interesting to listen to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), although I did not agree with everything he said, particularly about the former Prime Minister. I remember living night after night after night for 14 months, without cease, in an air raid shelter at the bottom of my garden in Liverpool, the second most bombed city outside London. I remember that my parents and other people used to ask whether it could have been prevented. It could have been prevented if people had stood up to Hitler much earlier than in 1939.

Incidentally, when we went to war it was not in defence of a democracy because at that time, Poland was close to being a military dictatorship. When, in 1940, we went to the aid of Greece and fought the Italians there, it was to defend not a democracy but an independent Greece under the rule of the Metaxas dictatorship.

As my hon. Friends have rightly said, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Arab subcontinent are not democracies. I admit that things have gone sour in eastern Europe, but if Mr. Gorbachev can successfully bring democracy to those countries, one of our war aims must be to bring democracy to the countries of the middle east.

The war aims should look forward to a middle east peace conference. Although I certainly would deny Saddam Hussein linkage of this conflict with the Palestinian problem, the problems of the middle east must undoubtedly be addressed by any conference at the end of the war. Not only the problem of Palestine but the problems of the Kurds and other minorities of the region and the lack of democracy in so many countries are at the root of many difficulties.

It is essential that we win the war and carry out the United Nations resolution, which calls for Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait by all necessary means, and for the restoration of international peace and security in the area. Resolution 678 also calls for international peace and security in the area. So long as Saddam Hussein rules in Iraq, peace cannot be maintained. The defeat of the Iraqi forces also means the demise of Saddam Hussein.

Some of us on this side of the House have fought for a long time to draw attention to the Iraqi dictatorship. On several occasions I have stood with many of my colleagues on platforms at fringe meetings at the Labour party conference under the auspices of CARDRI—the Campaign against Repression and for Democratic Representation in Iraq—speaking about the horrors of the dictatorships of Iraq and Iran. Our repesentations have fallen largely on deaf ears. Tories have not been interested, but we cannot maintain peace in the middle east or elsewhere through market forces.

If anything is more important than the control of the sale of arms, I have yet to hear it. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition drew particular attention to the supply of arms and equipment to Iraq and other countries. It is right that there should be some discussion and decisions in the United Nations on the whole question of arms to rotten, repugnant dictators, such as the one in Indonesia. It is right to draw attention to this now, because in future a dictatorship elsewhere may cause us trouble. We need a UN resolution that all arms sales should be under UN control. There should be no arms sales without UN sanction. That is the most important issue that needs to be addressed by a conference at the end of the war.

Although arms have not been sold by the British Government, perhaps even by British firms, to Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, unfortunately the Government have certainly connived at training military personnel who might be launched against our forces now. In answer to a question, I was informed by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces:

> "A total of 430 places on MOD training courses were allocated to Iraqi students between 1981 and the cessation of training, following Mr. Bazoft's execution, in March 1990." —*[Official Report,* 16 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 501.]

As late as March 1990, less than a year ago, we were training military personnel who are no doubt in the desert waiting for our troops to attack. They will use the skills which they learned here in this country against our forces, or "our lads" in the desert, as *The Sun* likes to call them.

Not only that, but in answer to a question to the Department of Education and Science, the Under-Secretary of State gave me information about the number of Iraqis at universities, polytechnics and other institutions of higher education. Between 1981 and 1989, there was an average of 952 Iraqis studying at our higher education establishments. Perhaps they were innocently studying sociology, social anthropology or philosophy, but I bet that, when I get an answer from the Minister about the breakdown of subjects, we shall find that they were studying chemical engineering or even nuclear engineering. It is an absolute disgrace that our trade in training people for service in dictatorial, military organisations should continue.

I hope that we shall learn the lesson from this war. I hope sincerely that we shall come to the end of the war rapidly, defeat Saddam Hussein, sweep him from power

and learn that, in future, we must ensure that there are no more sales of arms and there is no more training for countries under such vile leadership.

7.26 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): On behalf of the overwhelming majority of my constituents in Uxbridge, some of whom have sons and daughters serving in the armed forces and, doubtless, in the Gulf, I support the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

If anyone had told me 12 months ago that we would be fighting a major war with Iraq, I would have been incredulous. I had hoped and begun to believe that, after the encouraging events in eastern Europe last year, British forces would never again be deployed in a major conflict. I was looking forward, as I believe every hon. Member was, to a period of peace and co-operation with the people of eastern Europe and to moving forward into a new era when we would spend less on defence and more on things we need at home, such as education and the health service. Suddenly, in a matter of months, all those hopes were dashed and we found ourselves at war with Saddam Hussein and his military machine in Iraq.

My constituents recognise, as I do, that, unwelcome and desperately unhappy though the conflict is, there is unfortunately no alternative to armed force to liberate Kuwait and to prevent further aggression by a dictator who has made it clear to every hon. Member that his intentions would not have stopped at Kuwait, but would have gone much further if he had not been stopped.

The town of Uxbridge and my constituents have a special concern in addition to those that every hon. Member shares about the loss of human life in this conflict. The Royal Air Force is an integral part of our community. RAF Uxbridge is at the centre of my constituency and RAF Northolt and RAF West Drayton, in which my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) share an interest, are on the constituency boundaries.

My thoughts today, and those of many of my constituents, are with the courage and skill of our airmen and women who are engaged in sorties against military targets, and with those who provide back-up to make their operations possible. Some of those people are not mentioned much in the media: I mean the men and women who keep the aircraft flying, transport vital supplies and provide administrative support. All that is vitally important to the war effort.

I pay tribute to our aircrew, to their professional approach to their task and to the skill that enables them to bomb their targets so precisely as to destroy the Iraqi military machine, and to do so with virtually no civilian loss of life. This morning I heard John Simpson, the BBC's admirable correspondent, tell the British people on television that he thought it probable that fewer than 100 civilians had been injured in Baghdad, with virtually no deaths. What a contrast that is with the indiscriminate bombing of the civilian populations of combatant countries in the second world war, when I—like the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and others—spent my boyhood in the shelter, hearing enemy bombs rain down on home and country.

I endorse the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and his admirable handling of the whole dispute. We British—and, indeed, our allies—have no quarrel with the civilian population of Iraq; our quarrel is with one man and a few of his henchmen, for the totally unacceptable occupation of Kuwait. It is in that light that I express my concern for the RAF aircrew who are now prisoners of war in Iraq.

I am deeply concerned by reports that Iraq is to use prisoners of war as human shields by locating them at military targets in Iraq, in clear contravention of articles 3 and 13 of the Geneva convention. Today I obtained a copy of the latest version from the Library, and I commend it to any hon. Member who has not read it—as I had not until today. It is extremely revealing, and sets out very clearly the obligations that rest on Iraq. If the reports now appearing in the media are correct, Saddam Hussein is guilty of a serious war crime in contravention of the convention.

Hon. Members will remember that, in his broadcast on 20 January, Saddam Hussein said that Iraq would observe the Geneva convention in its treatment of prisoners of war. If Iraq is now seeking to attach its own conditions before observing the convention, it must be a matter of grave concern. That is entirely unacceptable to our country: using British prisoners of war as a human shield, or parading them on television, is a clear breach of the convention. Article 3 of the third Geneva convention requires that prisoners of war should be protected against insults and public curiosity; in all circumstances, they are entitled to respect for their persons and their honour.

Article 122 requires that Iraq should notify the central tracing agency of the International Red Cross within the shortest period of the names of all prisoners of war, whether or not their capture has been acknowledged. I hope that, when he winds up the debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be able to tell the House the extent to which the central tracing agency has informed the British Government of the names of our prisoners of war in Iraq. I hope that he will also be able to tell us what assistance is being given as a result of representations made to the International Red Cross, and what action Iraq is taking to aid the wounded and sick in accordance with article 3(2).

As I have said, I am proud—as, I know, are many other hon. Members on both sides of the House—of the skill and courage of RAF aircrew, and of the skill and courage of all our allies in the seven countries to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred at the beginning of the debate. Like all my constituents and all hon. Members, I devoutly hope that Saddam Hussein will recognise the inevitable and withdraw from Kuwait and that a lasting peace can be achieved in the middle east. I am confident that, if Saddam does that, a lasting peace can be achieved; but, if he does not, our country will see the conflict through to the end, despite the difficult times and the bad news that we may have to face. We shall do so because of the overwhelming support of the British people and because of the courage and excellence of all our armed forces. I am very proud of them.

7.35 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) was right to draw attention to the skill and potential sacrifice of our service men and women—as have many Conservative Members —but I hope that that praise will also take account of the

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facts mentioned by my hon. Friends. Some of those facts are not very pleasant. Let me, for once, be very outspoken in the House about Members' interests, and say that I hope that all Conservative Members who have any relationship with arms sales firms, whether or not they have been involved in Iraq, will think twice about the compatibility of that role with their duties as politicians.

The hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) was right to say that peace, and the prevention of war, were the profession of politicians. All the bravery of our service men and women can only provide an opportunity for politicians around the world, whatever label they bear, to make the peace. A just war requires a just peace, and preparations for a just peace.

Conservative Members have spoken about the last war. Fifty years ago the second world war was just beginning, but for the home front, as it was then called, the watchwords were "post-war reconstruction at home and international rehabilitation abroad". In June 1941, nearly 50 years ago, the Minister responsible for post-war reconstruction, Mr. Arthur Greenwood, appointed the then Sir William Beveridge and his committee; in August 1941, President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill met dramatically in mid-Atlantic and signed the Atlantic charter, which was the international basis for what later became the charter of the United Nations.

I believe that at this time we should take similar action. We should think about a "new deal" to amend the injustice and lack of security in—on this occasion—the whole of the middle east and consider how the United Nations can shape itself to meet the challenges that must surely come in whatever one has been calling a new era.

At home, for many people, there was not that much security before the war. Conservative Members have talked of the need for security for those in Israel, among others, but security is double-edged: as President Gorbachev has said, one state cannot obtain security by trying to undermine that of another state. We all understand that. The middle east needs the new security —the "new deal"—that this country obtained through the last war.

I suggest that the Government now put aside three separate teams. Although we may have different views about whether a war should take place and whether we should be fighting it, I think that the whole House should agree with such a suggestion. This country has a long history of relations with the area. A large number of Arabists, both active and retired, have served or are serving in the diplomatic service. The United Kingdom had a mandate from the League of Nations to administer Mesopotamia. We ought to put together a team of people with multidisciplinary skills and with knowledge of the area to consider the terms of the post-war settlement. That will not depend on the conference; it will depend on the conversations, analyses and suggestions that are made before any conference takes place.

The United Kingdom can take advantage of opportunities that are not open to the senior partners in the enterprise, the United States of America. The United States of America faces domestic, political and democratic difficulties that are causing problems. We want all the United nations resolutions to be spelt out. That has been done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and others.

At the end of the last war, a British middle east office was established. It included both a political division and a development division. The development division was concerned with rehabilitation and supplying the needs of people in want. The Gulf war will lead to tremendous physical destruction. Much reconstruction must come after it. Later, in Cairo, the development division became the first development division of the Overseas Development Administration. It was, alas, destroyed in 1980 by this Government. The middle east development division was dismantled, despite the fact that it was the only body that had comprehensive knowledge of arid and semi-arid areas.

The middle east development division ought to be re-established. A think tank should be established in Whitehall, consisting of those both outside and inside the ODA.

Another multidisciplinary team should be set out to deal with the physical needs of rehabilitation. After the last war, the United Nations established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. We need something similar to that, or a re-formed United Nations agency, to deal with want and distress in the middle east, of which there will be a great deal.

The future United Nations surely ought to be a different organisation from the mark I version that we have had so far. I regret the fact that Conservative Members of Parliament and their leaders have occasionally unduly criticised the United Nations. I remember what Lord Home of the Hirsel and the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said about it. Of course the United Nations was imperfect. Its agencies did not do all that they ought to have done when and how we should have liked. I have always kept the United Nations charter in my letter rack. If people say to me, "Why do you have it there, Nigel?" I reply, "Because it represents the standing orders of world peace."

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: No.

Mr. Spearing: It does. We have nothing else. I think that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) will agree with me that the United Nations was established to prevent war but, if war broke out, the United Nations' objective was to ensure that it was conducted justly. That is why this motion is before us. All we have is the charter on which to build. I hope that Conservative Members will look again at the history of their lack of support for the United Nations during the last few years.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spearing: As the rule is that speeches must last no longer than 10 minutes, I regret that I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. He will be able to make his own speech later, and we may also be able to correspond about the matter he wishes to raise.

The Government must give a moral lead by creating a team of people with experience of the United Nations agencies. It should include many distinguished civil servants, both active and retired, and politicians with

knowledge of the United Nations agencies. We must also remind our partners across the Atlantic that its record in respect of the United Nations is not impeccable.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: This is a United Nations war.

Mr. Spearing: Yes. The people of the United States are great-hearted and generous. Once they recognise the plight of people in the middle east, I am sure that that great nation, which shares many of our democratic ideals, will say that it ought to have placed greater emphasis on the role of the United Nations in peace—indeed, as much emphasis as the United States now places on it in war.

The United Kingdom and the United States of America did great things together in the last war. Their inspiration came from different quarters. I am sure that hon. Members and, I hope, the Government will provide similar inspiration now. We must remind our United States friends of the challenges that face them. We must make a peace that is worthy of this House and the United Kingdom.

7.45 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Before I comment on the conflict, I wish to refer to what was said by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). He referred to the lack of hospital facilities in this country. It has already been made perfectly clear that additional money will be made available to the regional hospital authorities if extra wards have to be opened to accommodate casualties from the middle east. So those who are waiting for hospital treatment should not have to wait any longer. I should have respected what was said by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East about casualties, had he made a similarly forceful and emotional speech during the past five months about the atrocities, casualties, deaths and deportations in Kuwait. His lopsided view of the conflict says it all.

No one who has watched or listened to the news reports about the Gulf conflict during the past few days can have anything but admiration for the aircrew who have flown continuous missions into Iraq and Kuwait, or be anything but stunned by the accuracy of the weapons and the technology they have had to back them up. In every sense, this is a high-speed conflict. I was fortunate enough to fly in a Tornado as recently as last May. It is an incredibly high-speed aircraft. Everything happens so fast. The aircrew and personnel on the ground have to react very speedily to any threat. Moreover, the results of an operation can be seen very quickly on our television screens.

There is little doubt that the quick and effective harnessing of modern technology to the Gulf war had a great part to play in the element of surprise last Wednesday evening when Iraq was attacked. That surprise led to Iraq's air force being badly damaged in the first few hours of the conflict. Since then, it has not been an effective force and I believe that it will be even less effective in the future.

Royal Air Force Tornados have played a critical role in achieving that objective. Their task, successfully accomplished, was to attack some of the most heavily defended targets in Iraq—notably, major airfields. Tornados were deployed mainly because they are fitted with the allies' most effective weapon, which incapacitates runways. Their success in achieving their objective was also because Tornados are able to fly at such high speed close to the ground, both day and night and in almost any weather.

That explains the number of Tornado losses. Although that number is very low, it is none the less greater than the number of other allied aircraft that have been lost. It is worth putting on record the fact that, but for the low-level training that crews receive in peacetime, they would have been unable to attack their targets with such success and with such effect during the past few days. I welcome the comments made last Thursday by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who now understands the necessity of low-flying training in the United Kingdom. I trust that we can count on his support to maintain that low-flying training in the future.

The devastating accuracy of the weapons being used by the allies is undoubtedly resulting in fewer civilian casualties than would have occurred in such a conflict in the past. I hope that Opposition Members who have commented on civilian casualties will note the huge amount of attention that is being paid by allied commanders to minimising civilian casualties when targets are selected. That compares favourably with the attitude of the Iraqis in the use of Scud missiles against cities and civilian populations in Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Apart from the accuracy of allied weapons, another important feature of the conflict has been the value of reconnaissance in assessing the effectiveness of attacks and in finding the targets for further missions. The view of the Royal Air Force has always been that that role should be a specialist one and separate from the ground attack roles of many aircraft, with specially adapted aircraft being used to carry out dedicated attacks. Our American allies have not placed the same emphasis on that separateness of functions. That partly explains the video cameras in some American attack aircraft and the excellent media coverage that has resulted from them, but it equally explains why the specialist reconnaissance Tornado was successfully tasked to seek out the Scud missile sites.

That weapon, which has been important politically and which, with the highly effective Patriot missile, has given a good performance for television news crews in Riyadh and Saudi Arabia, is of marginal significance in military terms and cannot affect the outcome of the conflict. What can affect its outcome is the extent to which allied air forces can destroy Saddam's ground forces before our troops are called on to take part and retake Kuwait. I am convinced that we are only beginning to see the effectiveness of high-tech weapons against ground equipment, and because of that I am equally convinced that the air campaign should continue for some time.

I should like to mention the men and women who are supporting the air campaign. Many of my constituents help to build the Tornado and many others from Lancashire are employed by British Aerospace to keep the Saudi air force in a first-class state of servicability. In that context, I was fortunate enough to visit Saudi Arabia under the auspices of British Aerospace as recently as last September. It is clear that many civilians from this country are doing an excellent job in Saudi Arabia supporting both the Saudi air force and the Royal Air Force.

I am particularly conscious of the attitude of the media to dependants of service men in the Gulf because both my brothers are serving there. I direct my remarks particularly at those parts of the media which, in their legitimate desire to sell newspapers or to get an interview first for their

[Mr. Keith Mans]

television channel, overstep the line between what is acceptable and decent and what causes great personal anguish to the combatants and their families. There is clearly a need to provide the media with as much information as possible without compromising our military planning. In that respect, the Ministry of Defence and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence are doing a very satisfactory job. Equally, it is the responsibility of the media to use that information sensibly.

Many hon. Members have dwelt on what sort of peace should follow the conflict. I have not done so because I believe that all our attention should be on expelling Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. If we are successful in that, Saddam Hussein's days, and those of the bandit state that he has created, are numbered and I look forward to an Iraqi regime that is more acceptable to the world community.

7.54 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): At Prime Minister's Question Time last week, I drew to his attention the fact that the need to know should be paramount in any statement made to the House. He gave me what I thought at the time was a satisfactory answer. The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) will no doubt remember some of the stories that he and I were told when we visited the Falklands two years ago. I have been haunted by some of the things that we were told on that occasion.

This is a high-tech war—some people have described it as an arcade game, rather too accurately. I say to the House and the news media that in such a war even the tiniest pieces of information can be of use to the enemy, who will use it to kill our soldiers, sailors and airmen on the ground in Saudi Arabia. We, especially Ministers and military spokesmen, should be careful about what we make public.

I have no doubt that, as soon as we try to conceal things that should be concealed, we shall face howls of fury from the media, but I would sooner have them howling than see one unnecessary death among our service men in the Gulf or anywhere else. In any case, it can all be told when the war is over. No doubt it will then look even more different than the news does an hour after we first see it on the television. I am sure that every hon. Member who has watched the blow-by-blow accounts has been horrified by how often words have had to be eaten within a hour or two, not least when Scud missiles were being launched.

Our self-interest in this war is not perhaps as great as it might have been in 1939, or even in the Falklands. We have an interest in ensuring that there is a rule of law in international affairs and that small nations enjoy their right to exist. We did not want this war, but we came up against a calculating individual who had set out to become a major force in that area by gaining control of a vital world commodity—oil—not by democratic will but simply by the use of brute force.

When I hear people discussing ways in which we could have avoided war, I wonder whether they understand the mind of the thug whom we are up against, because this is a naked demonstration of pure thuggery on a large scale by a man who, as far as I am aware, has practised it throughout his life. He is not an individual whom any hon. Member would want as a close friend, but for that matter many other leaders of that part of the world would fall into the same category.

The reality is that most middle east countries are not in the slightest democratic. There are differing degrees of sheer awfulness, right up to bare acceptability. The sooner we realise and accept that, the better for all of us. We are not choosing between two goods, but are choosing the least of the differing evils. We hope that eventually things will improve in that part of the world. I do not expect any quick improvement, any more than I expect it in other parts of the world.

People in the news media and outside the House have lamented the possible consequences of attacking Iraq. They say that Saddam Hussein is so determined to get his own way that he will use any means that come to hand: that he will burn oilfields, use violence against people by torturing them—he has been dong that for years—and will resort to nuclear weapons, if he has them, and biological weapons. Some people say that, because Saddam Hussein is capable of such awfulness, perhaps we should deal gently with him and try to talk to him. We were told in this debate that some of his people who refused to serve were hanged. Those are not reasons for leaving this individual alone. They are good reasons for removing him from any position of authority as quickly as possible before his evil spreads.

I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) about the Israelis' self-interest in not responding to the Scud attacks. Anyone who believes that that was not self-interest should look at the matter again. The Israelis would have been mad to carry out any attack. Self-interest is also important to the Syrians, who see the prospect of a dangerous person having his power removed. I take a jaundiced view of some of the praise that has been heaped on folk who have an enlightened self-interest for following a course of action which they have apparently been persuaded to follow. It has been in their self-interest to follow that course; any other would do them much more damage.

Many other hon. Members want to take part in the debate and, although we are no longer governed by the 10-minute rule, I shall try to restrict myself to it. Saddam Hussein has called for terrorist action in support of his actions. I hope that that has been taken on board in this country. Northern Ireland Members are aware of what terrorists can do. We have no doubt that Saddam Hussein has tried to call in the bills that are owed to him by the Irish Republican Army through the Palestine Liberation Organisation and other organisations.

There has not been much terrorist activity by those organisations, any more than there has been much reaction from the Iraqi air force. We are not sure whether the efforts of the security forces in the western world have prevented such attacks, just as we are not sure whether the efforts of the air forces attacking Iraq have prevented the Iraqi air force from getting into action. We should all be alert. These people are not stupid. They are clever, devious and dangerous and, if they get a chance to butcher some people in pursuit of their aims, they will certainly do it. That applies no less to the Province which I have the honour to represent than to anywhere else in the world.

I fully support the Government's motion, which says all that needs to be said. I have some difficulty with the amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends. There are some rumours that

a deal has been done and that there will not be a vote if the Front-Bench spokesmen can avoid it. I understand that, because they want to present a united front.

The motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition

"commends the instructions to minimise civilian casualties wherever possible".

A few words are missing. The motion should read, "wherever possible, without placing our service men's lives at unnecessary risk". That may be the sense of the motion, but it is not what it says.

The motion refers to returning

"with renewed vigour to resolving the wider problems in the Middle East."

Hon. Members should remember what I said about the thug. This individual will seize on even the slightest crack to claim that he has secured linkage with the Palestinian issue. It is in the interests of the world, especially of the middle east, that people should know that Saddam Hussein is being opposed for his wickedness alone and that the issue should not be tied to another serious, enduring problem which we all hope will be resolved, for the good of the world in the long term.

8.4 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): One of the pleasing, major features of the war into which we have entered is the lack of jingoism shown by the majority of hon. Members and of the world community. Everyone accepts the necessity to deal with Saddam Hussein and all his works in Iraq.

The most important factor about the war is that it is the United Nations war. It is not a war between Iraq and the United States and Britain. For the first time since 1948, a unified United Nations—the family of nations—is standing up against an international bully and saying, "You cannot take over a sovereign state and be allowed to get away with it". We must take that sovereign state back and re-establish it. *[Interruption.]* I hear what Opposition Members say and I respect their right to say that they do not support the war. Democracy would fail if they were not allowed to express that view. However, I would say to them, especially to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), that it does not make any difference, under the principles that we wish to uphold, whether the sovereign state being taken over is a democracy.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) rightly pointed out, during the last war we went to the assistance of Poland and Greece, which were not democracies. We are in the same position now. We have gone to the assistance of Kuwait, which is not a democracy. That is not the principle; the principle for which we are fighting is the right of sovereign states to run their political life without interference from their neighbour and without aggression.

We must look carefully at the man at the helm. As a student of history, like many other hon. Members, I see many parallels between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler. If we had not appeased Hitler in the 1930s, we might not have been involved in such a widespread world war between 1939 and 1945. The world has learned from that. Members of the United Nations have been drawn together and the organisation has been given strength because members have recognised that we cannot appease dictators and that we must deal with them.

We need only consider the man with whom we are dealing. He used chemical weapons on his own people in Kurdistan. For eight years, he invaded a neighbouring country, Iran, and thousands of his citizens were killed in the battles between the two countries. This man has no respect for human life or for human rights. Some abuses of human rights in Iraq over the past few years have been appalling: torture and the lack of what we in the House take for granted—freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Basic freedoms which we champion have been trodden all over by this man.

Saddam Hussein is doing exactly the same thing in this war. One of the saddest parts of the war is his use of service men from the allied air force as shields against the bombing. That is a clear breach of the Geneva convention, of the basic rules of human rights, of all the decent things for which we in the House stand. We cannot allow this to happen. At the end of the conflict, Saddam Hussein must be brought to account.

I believe that, regrettably, sanctions were not going to work. The scientific evidence shows that Saddam Hussein was far too close to having nuclear weapons which he could have used. Imagine a man who is not bothered about world opinion and who is prepared to fight for eight years, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives, having the capacity to use nuclear weapons. Having to deal with Saddam Hussein 18 months from now, following the failure of sanctions, would be an entirely different matter. It was right to attempt to do so, and to prevent him from going further, following the 15 January deadline.

The big issue for the House and for the whole world is how far we should go. Should we stop if and when Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait? Should we turn round and say, "This man is a war criminal; we must deal with him"? Should we take the war all the way to Baghdad and destroy Saddam Hussein in his capital city? Or should we turn to the people of Iraq and say, "You have put this man at the helm; you must now remove him"? Should we leave it to the Iraqi people? At the moment, those issues are being blurred in the House and in the alliance. But we will have to take a decision. We cannot merely live in the hope that Saddam Hussein will somehow be destroyed.

We must also consider the involvement of Israel. I agree with those of my hon. Friends who have said that Israel has shown remarkable restraint and courage in refusing to respond to Iraq's attacks. Saddam Hussein wants to break up the international alliance. He wants to involve Israel and move us towards universal war. The Israelis have shown respect for world peace and great discretion in seeking to prevent that. We must have great respect for that attitude and we must help Israel in every way that we can. That does not mean that, at the end of the conflict, we should ignore Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, but at this stage we should separate the two issues. There can be no linkage between the Palestinians' problems and the occupation of Kuwait. The two are entirely separate. This war is about the freeing of Kuwait and about ensuring that Kuwait remains an independent sovereign state.

The major issue today is what happens at the end of the conflict. The peace is a vital factor. The end of the first world war brought the treaty of Versailles. Anyone who has studied the period will know that the causes of the second world war were firmly rooted in the treaty of Versailles. Hitler's writings in the 1920s and 1930s show

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

how he thrived on the dissatisfaction caused by the treaty and how that eventually led to the rise of the Nazis and to the second world war. There are lessons to be learnt.

If we go so far as to remove Saddam Hussein from the leadership of Iraq, we must ensure that we establish democracy in that part of the middle east. Perhaps that will be the beginning of the process in the surrounding states that Opposition Members seek. Perhaps the example of eastern Europe may be followed in the middle east and more democratic states will develop.

I fully support the motion. Nothing worth striving for has ever been achieved without cost. What we are striving for in this just war is lasting world peace. That is worth fighting for. It will necessarily entail the loss of life, but it is to be hoped that we shall end up with a United Nations newly empowered, with new strength and new respect, and so with peace in the world for generations to come.

8.13 pm

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): Now that our forces are committed, there can be no question of a pause or of a ceasefire until we receive a clear, credible, irrevocable message from the Iraqi Government that they are ready to withdraw from Kuwait. It is hard to imagine that that message will come now and we must therefore be willing to pursue the war until the terms of the United Nations resolutions are fulfilled.

Despite all the technological wizardry that we have seen in recent days, we should have no illusions: the burden of the task ahead will fall upon the all-to-human shoulders of ordinary troops. It is to be hoped that the Iraqi Government will recognise the futility of their cause, but if they do not, we must expect the fighting to be bitter.

Is the cause for which this war is being fought right? Without doubt, it is. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) pointed out that Kuwait was not a democratic or particularly likeable or savoury regime. The Polish regime in 1939 was not a democratic or particularly likeable regime; it was an authoritarian and anti-semitic Government. That was not the point then, and the nature of the Kuwaiti regime is not the point now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East was right to stress the cost of the war that the allies expect to have to fight. Is the expected cost commensurate with the potential gain? So far as we can reasonably foresee, the cost will indeed be commensurate, because the political gain could well be—indeed, it has to be—a general settlement that will secure peace, stability and the opportunity for progress for all states and all peoples of the middle east. The ultimate gain will be an unprecedented victory for the rule of international law as enforced by the United Nations.

It is because of the importance of establishing the rule of international law that the Foreign Secretary has been absolutely right to stress that it cannot be one of our aims to change the Government of Iraq. That is why the Opposition were right to oppose previous United States actions in Panama and Grenada. We did so not because we supported the dictatorships in those countries or because we doubted that a change of regime in those countries would constitute an improvement but because once dislike of, or distaste for, the regime of another country becomes an acceptable pretext for attacking that country, there can be no such thing as the rule of international law. Any state can use that pretext to justify an attack upon any other state. Indeed, Iraq has tried to use it in this instance. I hope, therefore, that, in future, the Foreign Secretary will be more ready than his predecessors to remind American Governments of the basic rule of international law and of the fact that that law, if it is to be law, can have no exceptions.

I have said that I believe that the war is being fought for a just purpose. I have said that we must see it through. But was war inevitable? Personally, I do not believe that, had Iraq continued to be unwilling to withdraw, sanctions alone would have worked. Iraqi tank divisions could have been made immobile by the lack of oil and spare parts, but they would still have been sitting in Kuwait. Certainly, a more prolonged period of sanctions could have weakened the Iraqi military further and made things easier for our troops, but sanctions alone could never have restored the sovereignty of Kuwait. I return to my question: was war, then, inevitable? I am not sure that it was, and that is a truly dreadful thought.

There has been a great failure in the tone and substance of American diplomacy as regards Iraq. Without doubt, there is now greater urgency to search for a general middle east settlement than there was before the crisis began. We saw evidence of that urgency in the speeches from both Front Benches. It should have been possible for diplomats to portray that urgency, before 15 January, in a way that might have allowed the Iraqi Government a face-saving back door out of Kuwait. That should at least have been attempted. But, time and again, the Americans insisted that they were not in the business of allowing Saddam Hussein to save face. I believe that that was an error, and I fear that it shows a continuing immaturity in American diplomacy. It is certainly right to go to war, if necessary, to protect small states from aggressive and vicious neighbours, but it is abysmally foolish to end up at war simply because one is not willing to allow one's opponent to save some face.

That chapter is now closed, however, and it will be for the historians to pass judgment on the failures of western diplomacy, both before and since the invasion of Kuwait. Our job now is to turn our attention to the diplomatic task after the war is over. I see that task as twofold. First, for the west, there has to be a sustained and unyielding effort to bring about a genuine middle east settlement. American sloth and subservience to Israel have contributed greatly to the present tragedy. It must not be allowed to lead to another. Of course we congratulate the Israelis on their restraint in the face of recent missile attacks. However, a settlement that allows the Palestinians self-determination is as much in Israeli interests as in the interests of the international community.

Secondly, there is a special lesson to be learned by the countries of western Europe. My views here might be a little unfashionable at the moment. I believe that there must be a renewed effort to integrate political co-operation into the framework of the European Community.

Community foreign policy must become subject to majority decision making within the Community. In recent weeks, some have drawn the opposite conclusion. They claim that the scenes of division and disarray within the Community in the run-up to war prove that we can never achieve the aim of majority decision making in that context. On the contrary, that experience is a reason for

saying why we must act in that way. Unless we have an institutional framework for ensuring a unified response, we are doomed to repeat these European displays of disunity and disarray.

The French were right in the substance of their solo diplomacy in the last few days before war. However, they were quite wrong to believe that they could carry it off by themselves. If Community foreign policy continues to be a policy of competing amid jealous individual states, American Governments will continue to dominate and dictate the agenda to us. Europeans have too much to offer in terms of policy and too much to lose in terms of self-respect to allow such scenes to be repeated.

The allied forces are acting under the authority of the United Nations, and they are not simply fighting for little Kuwait: they are fighting for a new international order. That at least is the promise made by the west, and that is a promise that we must strain every sinew to fulfil after this tragic war is over.

8.21 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): Over the past decade, Saddam Hussein's regime has been one of the prime causes of the chronic instability affecting the middle east. If, through lack of resolve on our part and that of our allies, Saddam Hussein had been allowed to get away with his seizure of Kuwait, that instability would have been made worse; a solution to middle east problems would have been made more remote; the arms race in the area would have intensified, and the potential for conflagration would have become even greater.

Saddam Hussein's taste for aggression and reckless militarism is appreciated only too well by Iraq's neighbours. It is significant that even Syria, for so long the arch-enemy of the west, is now lined up with us as a military ally in opposition to Saddam. That shows above anything else just how deep runs the fear and distrust of Saddam Hussein in many Arab countries. Iraq's expulsion from Kuwait and Saddam Hussein's defeat, particularly if it is accompanied by his overthrow, could be a powerful force for stability in the middle east.

At the moment, the war must seem of precious little benefit to the people of Iraq. However, there could be benefits for them, as well as for their neighbours, if the war —directly or indirectly—leads to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. They could obviously reap considerable advantage from that.

Presumably the Kurds would welcome Saddam's removal after the terrible sufferings that he has inflicted on them. We should remember that the Kurds account for no less than a quarter of Iraq's population. I believe that the hatred and resentment of Saddam in Iraq extends beyond the Kurds.

A regime as repressive, corrupt, nepotic and as idiosyncratic as Saddam Hussein's is likely to be hated and loathed by many of those who have the misfortune to live under it. I can see the destruction of Saddam's military machine ridding neighbouring countries of a threat and the Iraqis of a tyrant and also providing, if properly exploited, a better prospect than has existed for a long time of an overall peace settlement in the middle east.

A great deal will depend on three factors. The first is the extent to which we respect Arab sensitivities and the extent to which we and our allies are successful in keeping civilian casualties to a minimum and avoid damage to Muslim holy places. It is immensely reassuring that great efforts are obviously being made by our pilots and the other allied airmen to ensure that that is the case. Having said that, we should recognise that precision bombing of the kind necessary to achieve those aims enormously increases the risks that those airmen must face.

The second factor on which the successful peace settlement will depend is the speed with whch Americans, British and other western ground forces are withdrawn after the conflict. Obviously we will need to retain a presence in the area, but that should be a discreet presence, in the background, consisting of support by air and sea. I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister acknowledged the importance of that aspect and said that he believed that it would be unwise for us to retain ground forces in the region once the conflict is over.

The third crucial, and perhaps most important, element is that there must be a determined, thorough effort in the immediate aftermath of war to solve the Palestinian problem. It was right to avoid linkage of the Palestinian problem in the context of the invasion of Kuwait. That invasion was clearly wrong and it needed to be put right promptly. The Palestinian problem is a very different and much more complex issue which should be addressed with more time and care.

A thorough effort of the kind that I have in mind would involve putting pressure on Israel to come to terms. In saying that, I do not take an unfriendly attitude towards Israel. A solution to the Palestinian problem involving some significant concessions by Israel is in the long-term interests of Israel itself. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) that any middle eastern settlement must at its heart involve a secure Jewish state.

The impact of the war will self-evidently be greatest in the middle east. However, it will also have a powerful effect on American relations with the European Community and with Japan. At the moment, American minds are concentrated on military objectives and the task of winning the war. However, when the war is over and the Americans count the cost and consider the impact on their finances, there is a risk that some resentment will arise in the United States at the lack of support—financial, military and moral—from Japan and all too many countries in European Community.

That could be very dangerous indeed. It could worsen still further the prospects of successful trade negotiations, and it could also imperil the necessary continuing defence co-operation between America and the other countries of the west both inside and outside Europe. If we need any reminders of just how important that continuing defence co-operation is, we need only consider recent events in Estonia and Latvia.

In that context, Britain will have a special role to play. It is recognised in America, and especially by the American Government, just how considerable is our contribution to the war in the Gulf. Numerically, our contribution may be significantly less than that of the United States, but it is significantly greater than that of any other European Community country. Its quality is unsurpassed.

That fact means that we should have particular influence with the United States when it comes to dealing with trade negotiations and defence issues in and outside Europe. There lies ahead for us an important role in that

[Mr. Michael Irvine]

context, acting as an invaluable bridge between the United States and the European Community in the aftermath of the Gulf war.

8.30 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): This is a remarkable debate from several perspectives. The most important is the incredible degree of unity, if not of consensus, that exists in the Chamber and, far more important, outside. There will never be consensus on many issues in the House. Those who dissent are not pacifists, neutralists, fifth columnists, agents of international communism, or agents of Saddam. In any democracy, it is healthy for there to be scepticism among the Opposition towards the war aims of a Government. That is the virtue of our system.

I was in the United States 10 days ago. One of the many things that struck me was the absence of high enthusiasm on the part of congressmen and others for a war that we now know was absolutely inevitable. Some people believe that the United States is filled with warmongers who are hell-bent on establishing American domination throughout the world and who, given half a chance, will send forces anywhere at any time. Anyone who knows the United States and takes an interest in defence matters will be aware of the enormous impact that the humiliations of the Vietnam war still has on every aspect of society. That is why the Americans have moved with some reluctance to the major role of contributing to the forces against Saddam Hussein. They did so not with high enthusiasm but with moral rightness. There was and is an almost total absence of what we on this side of the Atlantic have historically called jingoism. That characteristic can be seen in this House, too. There is a sober reflection and analysis of the task to be undertaken.

That is very different from what happened during the first world war. I recall reading Kenneth Morgan's biography of Keir Hardie and the enormous anger and sadness that he felt when war was declared. He found that his party totally disagreed with him. He, Ramsay MacDonald and a handful of people were opposed to the war. He was mortified when Members of the House of Commons burst into English patriotic songs, led by a Labour Member of Parliament. He was even more mortified when he went home to his constituency. A meeting in Aberdare was disrupted by the singing of Welsh patriotic songs. He was barely able to get out of the meeting without physical violence.

We do not have the intense fervour of those days in 1914 or of some other wars. There is a resignation that war is inevitable—a resignation that no amount of negotiations with Iraq would have succeeded. The overwhelming majority of the population accepted the inevitable conclusion of this conflagration—a war that we did not seek but a war that must be successfully prosecuted. Therefore, I hope that hon. Members appreciate that others who disagree with their views do not disrespect them—they respect them. I hope that that respect will be reciprocated and that hon. Members will not regard us as bloodthirsty imperialists who are intent on re-establishing imperialist hegemony over a part of the world which, for far too long, has been subjected to external influences.

There is not much point in going over all the arguments about why British, American, Muslim and United Nations forces are engaged in the Gulf. I would have much preferred it if sanctions could have worked. I should have liked it if sanctions could have been applied for longer. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) referred to William Webster of the CIA who said that sanctions were working. That report was based on Les Aspin's three White Papers that were submitted to Congress and the public two weeks ago.

However, my hon. Friend cited only part of the testimony. The analysis is generally that sanctions were working but that they would take much longer to be effective. Most important, there was no bridge between sanctions working and decision-making on the part of Saddam Hussein that would be consequent upon sanctions working. His military would get the majority of the declining source of food. They would have ample opportunity to dig in if sanctions were applied longer. They would be able clandestinely to rearm and to replace worn-out or defective equipment.

The fatal weakness of sanctions was that it would take 18 months or two years for them to be effective, and then there would be no guarantee that the suffering of the Iraqi people would have been translated into the demise of that repugnant regime. It is important to bear that point in mind.

The euphoria of the first day or so of the war has been dissipated. Not only will the war be longer rather than shorter, but there will be many setbacks. No doubt ships will be sunk and many lives will be lost. We must appreciate that, if our goals are to be achieved, we cannot throw in the towel simply upon the receipt of news of setbacks. Another important development has been that in the past few days we have seen the coalition holding together.

According to information so far available, a further factor of great importance has been the relative limitation on loss of life on both sides, which must be welcomed. That is partly due to the fact that we are deliberately not targeting the civilian population. It must be hoped that that policy will continue. Another important factor in the past few days has been the incredible success of precision-guided munitions. They are good, very good, but not all that good. One thing that is absolutely apparent, but which was not apparent a day or two ago, is that the overwhelming superiority of the allied air forces in zapping every airfield in sight and chasing Scud missiles has been only partially successful. It is now obvious that airfields —probably many airfields—are still operational. The large majority of the Iraqi air force is probably still intact. Therefore, it is rather utopian to think that, by themselves, smart munitions will win the war. That will not happen.

Another matter of some concern to me, which is based on my knowledge of and interest in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is that ammunition is not in such supply as to enable us to fight a war in perpetuity. I just hope that the ammunition storage sites are properly activated in NATO and that we will be able to prosecute the war to its conclusion, whatever that conclusion may be, with adequate supplies of ammunition and adequate storage. I desperately hope that any misgivings that one might have about limitations of stocks in this regard prove to be unfounded.

I wish to raise a point about the Scud missile and its derivatives. I have great sympathy for the Palestinians, but there is no reason why that should exclude sympathy for

the Israelis and the right of Israel to exist as a nation. However, I must confess that I was rather alarmed and surprised about the debate in Israel which emerged at the time of the bombardment of Tel Aviv and some other cities by Scud missiles. Although there was no loss of life, there was a distinct likelihood, because of public opinion and for historical reasons, of which I am fully aware, that the action might precipitate the Israeli Cabinet into military action.

I am thankful that those fears have been allayed, but I wonder for how long. I am sure that my voice and even the voices of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition will not have an enormous impact on the decision-makers in Israel, but I can only hope that combined pressure will ensure that Israel does not retaliate in a limited form or in a form which it is very capable of exercising. To those who argue that the Arab nations will say that Israel can respond, but only in a proportionate manner and the alliance will hold together, I say that we must reject that theory. I would much prefer that the Israelis did not respond in any way.

I believe that it is important for the Ministry of Defence to sharpen up its act in terms of public information. The Select Committee on Defence conducted an inquiry after the Falklands war, when it was pointed out how dreadful the public information network was in the Ministry of Defence. It is better than it was then. I am not arguing the case to bring back Ian McDonald because all is forgiven, but I am emphasising that it is very important for the Ministry of Defence to sharpen its act in its presentation of information. Much more must be done on that front and I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence realises it.

Mr. Dalyell: Does not my hon. Friend think it odd that the Ministry of Defence has chosen the chairman of a private organisation, Shandwick, Mr. Peter Gummer,—I make no particular complaint that he happens to be the brother of a Cabinet Minister—to present the case? Does he agree that that needs some explanation?

Mr. George: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I was thinking more in terms of the actual presentation within the Ministry of Defence and the realisation by everyone concerned that the United States has presented its case infinitely better. There are lessons to be learnt.

Success in war is the result of many factors. It is the result of good quality equipment in sufficient quantity; of political and military leadership; of political goals and military strategy. Success is the result of the dedication of personnel, of political support and of luck. I very much hope that all those factors exist and that success will be guaranteed. However, I warn the House that there are some who feel that success is inevitable just because of numbers, legitimacy of cause and the fact that we are largely a first world nation taking on a second or third world nation which has aspirations to being a first world nation. But success is not necessarily guaranteed and things could go wrong. I hope that public opinion is sufficiently mature to appreciate that there may be setbacks and failure to achieve objectives in a short time. But such is the legitimacy of our cause and the desire to create a better world minus Saddam Hussein that I hope that any setbacks will be absorbed so that we can go on to eventual victory and the creation of a more equitable and better world, not just in the middle east but throughout the globe.

8.46 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): The fact that I agree with virtually everything that the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) has said indicates the degree of unanimity across the Floor of the House. It also makes the task of finding something new to say rather difficult. Therefore, I will be as brief as possible. Many points have been covered during the debate. As one who had the privilege in October last year of meeting some of the Royal Air Force crews deployed in Saudi Arabia, I was able to witness that tension which they felt and the calm, steely resolve that has been displayed for all of us to see on the television in recent days.

Like other hon. Members, I pay tribute to the aircrews of the Royal Air Force for their sheer guts and professionalism in the way they have performed their task. When I woke up on Thursday morning, it was to the sombre realisation that an awesome war had been embarked upon. However, I felt a sense of pride that squadrons of the Royal Air Force were participating in some of the most difficult tasks in the battle to liberate Kuwait. I do not believe that pride to be in any way misplaced. It was a perfectly honourable and noble response to the actions of those crews flying alongside the equally brave American, Saudi and other air forces. As my own late father served with 31 Squadron RAF in the last war, I felt some personal pride that 31 Squadron was among the first in action last week.

I do not think we should be under any illusion that this has been an easy ride for the Royal Air Force. It certainly has not. As we know, there have been casualties, but the fact that the number of casualties has been so low as a proportion of the number of sorties undertaken must not lead us to believe that these aircrews have not met any opposition. They have met opposition, and they have been more than equal to that task. They have acquitted themselves with considerable courage and effectiveness.

Much of this has its origins in the training they have undertaken. I suppose that all of us have at one time or another received complaints from constituents about low flying and the intrusion that this has caused. I hope that all those who have written to us with such complaints will now reflect that their tolerance of the Royal Air Force in its low-flying exercises over all parts of the United Kingdom has played no small part not only in the successful military operations that have been undertaken but in ensuring that our crews, as they undertake such operations, have a much better chance of coming through alive than they would if they had not been allowed to engage in low-flying sorties. Yet now the Germans have imposed restrictions on crews serving in Germany.

Every life lost is a family's tragedy and one should not minimise that in any respect. However, one must acknowledge that the training itself undertaken by these pilots over many years has not been without hazard. Between 1987 and 1989 no fewer than 40 Royal Air Force lives were lost as a result of accidents.

I also pay tribute to the manufacturers of the equipment. I do not think that anyone has mentioned them. We all have constituents who work in the defence industries and they also have acquitted themselves well. I

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also pay tribute to civilians who are serving with British Aerospace and other British and foreign companies in Saudi Arabia who are playing their part in this heroic enterprise. We all hope that the air strikes will bring the Iraqis to their senses. If they fail to do so, the land forces will be committed and many of my constituents serving with the Staffordshire Regiment will be involved. We all hope, not only for their sake but for the sake of the people of Iraq, that these air strikes will be successful in inflicting maximum military damage on Iraq in order to bring its leader and its people to their senses.

We have all been stunned by the sophistication of the equipment deployed, and riveted by the capabilities of the Patriot anti-missile system. The fact that a reporter can talk about a Tomahawk missile threading its way, at eye level, down a street shows the advances that we have made. However, there is a lesson for my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench in this. It is that we have to recognise that, without some of this sophisticated equipment, we might have been seeing different pictures, and the reports that my right hon. Friends have brought to the House would have been different.

I hope that we will learn the lesson that "Options for Change" must be reviewed in the light of this conflict. We owe it to our forces never to send them into battle with second-rate equipment. I hope that we shall continue the process of modernisation and updating, particularly as we do not know what is happening in eastern Europe. There are two new systems—the multi-launch rocket system, which is not yet in use, and the air-launched anti-radar missile, which is undergoing a baptism of fire.

Journalists have also shown great bravery. Although it is invidious to single out individuals, I feel that John Simpson of the BBC has distinguished himself in his presentation of cool and dispassionate reports. An enormous burden of resposibility rests on the shoulders of journalists, and I hope that they acknowledge that. Ministers and commanders in the battle are operating in a goldfish bowl. It is important that journalists recognise that they are, first and foremost, British and that they must use great discretion.

For example, one of my constituents complained that the Israelis were being hounded to say where the Scud missiles had fallen and that Israeli Ministers were being hounded about why they were not going to retaliate. That should not be the job of British journalists. They should not harry people engaged in this exercise. It may be necessary for my right hon. Friends and military commanders to give out disinformation. They may need to employ that tactic so as to save lives, when they are conducting this war in a goldfish bowl.

As has been said, we all have constituents with families involved in this business. I hope that journalists on both national and local papers will make it their business to ensure, before they go knocking on the doors of the families whose sons, husbands and daughters have been involved in action, that the visiting officers of the Ministry of Defence have been there first. I also hope that they will respect the privacy of these families.

I have a technical point for my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. There is some concern about reinforcements. Young men who are queuing up in my constituency to enlist in the armed forces, particularly the Army, are being turned away because there is a cap on recruiting. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to reassure us that there will be sufficient reserves, should it be necessary to call on them.

This will not be a swift business, and there could be setbacks. We owe it to our armed forces to remain united in a common resolve to remove this evil tyrant from the world. It is only right that the chemical and nuclear capabilities of Iraq should be taken out, and we should not flinch from removing the principal villain, Saddam Hussein. As a nation, we have every right to be proud of our soldiers, sailors and airmen, who deserve unstinting support. In turn, they have good reason to be proud of their country's political leaders, on both sides of the House. They have served our forces well. I congratulate my right hon. Friends and the leaders of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. I hope that we shall be able to continue the enterprise in the spirit in which it started.

8.54 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I think that all of us would have preferred to be able to vote in a way that expressed our support for our troops and our concern for our civilians who are in Saudi Arabia, including some of my constituents who work with British Aerospace, and who cannot come back. However, the procedures of the House do not allow us to vote in that way, so we are particularly keen on making it clear that our concern for these people drives us to continue our protest that this war is not necessary, and was not inevitable. It is questionable whether it is even properly authorised by the United Nations. We should feel more confident about the United Nations aspect had we not seen for ourselves that the Secretary-General was not consulted in any way, shape or form about the timing of the action.

In December, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) gave us some wise words of warning. He said:

"What concerns many of us here and in the United States is that President Bush, by his words and deeds, is making it more difficult to use the necessary means that will restore peace and stability to the middle east. He is threatening to commit us all to a course that will destroy the possibility of peace and stability for at least a generation."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 858.]

That was as true as what my right hon. Friend said last week, which was that the British and American Governments have shown

"a quite stupefying lack of proportion."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 770.]

Many people are protesting about the situation that we are in, and are not willing to be drawn into saying that this is out of our hands. Some 106 Members of the European Parliament said a week ago that they wanted "no part" in the proposed war, and they solemnly denounced it

"before the peoples of the world."

They showed that the conditions laid down by the United Nations simply have not been abided by or complied with. They said:

"a collision between one million-plus armed men using the most fiendish modern military equipment, will restore neither peace nor security."

The objective of the United Nations is supposed to be to restore peace and security. How will the launching of this conflict do that?

People have said that sanctions would have been too difficult, as if war somehow is an easier option. Every one of the reasons given to show the difficulty of pursuing the

sanctions option applies even more to war. To say that Saddam Hussein is very powerful is equal to saying that it will be very difficult to defeat him in war. It has not been established that, however despotic a ruler, he could pursue his aims with a bankrupted economy.

The Catholic Primate of all Ireland yesterday said that it is impossible, because of the destructive power of modern weaponry, to talk in terms of a just war. The Primate said:

"a great opportunity to defeat Iraq through international sanctions had been missed . . . The saddest thing is that in modern war there are no victors; everyone is a loser."

If it would be difficult to conduct a protracted campaign of sanctions, how much more difficult will it be to conduct a protracted war? An American military doctor, reported in *The Independent* today, said that he thinks people do not appreciate the scale of the problem. He said;

"You're going to have a million men fighting each other here—think about that, a million, that's thousands of dead, tens of thousands of wounded. There will be Iraqi wounded coming in with British and American wounded and unidentified bodies. I've read about what happened in the Second World War. Many corpses, you just never find out whose they are. They all become unknown warriors."

We are here today solemnly discussing this matter as politicians. We are facing a Government who have not shown by a single word that they recognise the crime that was committed by the developed countries in arming Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein would not have been able to invade Kuwait or anywhere else had he not been armed by the developed nations. There has not been a word from the Government to show that they have understood that lesson. There has not been a word of apology to our forces for the fact that, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition reminded us, there were means of making arms sold until recently by this country to Iraq.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary reminded the parliamentary Labour party this morning that, until March last year, Iraqi troops were being trained in this country. There has not been a word of apology or explanation from the Government about that, nor any assurance that such matters will not recur. It is Saddam Hussein this time. Which other dictator will it be next time, and which other forces from our country and our constituencies will face him?

I have no confidence that these lessons have been learnt. That is why I do not accept that the Opposition amendment is sufficiently strong or specific. It is not enough to say that the

"international community must return with renewed vigour to resolving the wider problems in the middle east".

What does "return with renewed vigour" mean? There has been no vigour shown. It cannot be returned to and there is nothing specific in the amendment, which is precisely why the Government can accept it. It is precisely that which undermines its value.

I would dearly have liked the Opposition to table an amendment which would have allowed us all to rally, to look for a future negotiated settlement—a peace settlement for the whole of the middle east. There is no sign of that at all. Therefore, very regretfully, I feel that I can show my concern for those Britons who are likely to be trapped in tanks and fried in the new trench warfare only by going into the Lobby against what is happening.

9.3 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): What is quite clear, after the hostilities have now been going for several days, is that this is a war that no one wanted, except for Saddam Hussein. This war would never have taken place if Saddam Hussein had not invaded Kuwait on 2 August. It would never have taken place if, at any time between 2 August and 16 January, Saddam Hussein had withdrawn from Kuwait.

We in the Labour party argued that it should not even have taken place on 16 January. We argued that more time should have been given for sanctions and diplomacy to work. But it has to be said that, in the end, Iraq rejected diplomacy. The last-minute French initiative was turned down out of hand on the very last available day. Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, declared that he was not interested in any further diplomatic efforts.

Now that the war is on, we in the Labour party give our full support to British troops as they go into action. The whole country will have been impressed with the feelings expressed by the members of our armed forces. They do not voice any "Boys' Own Paper" or Biggles relish for the fight. They are patriotic, but not jingoistic. They admit their fear but express their determination.

We mourn those who have lost their lives, and our heartfelt sympathy goes to their families. So far, casualties among our service men are not as many as must have been feared. So far, according to both Iraqi and allied sources, casualties among Iraqis are far fewer than might have been expected at the beginning, taking into account the ferocity and intensity of the conflict. However, every individual casualty on both sides is one too many, and that includes Israeli civilians. So far, by sheer chance and nothing else, none of them has been killed, but they have been targets for unprovoked terroristic missile attacks on civilian populated centres.

The most dominant reason why we want the war to be over as soon as possible is that we want the killing to be over as soon as possible. These deaths are the most unacceptable price paid by the people of the world, including the people of Iraq, for the aggression of Saddam Hussein.

If there is to be any justification for the payment of that price, we must be clear about three things. First, we must be clear about precisely why the war is being fought. Secondly, we must be clear about what we must do when the war is over.

For us in the Labour party, the reasons for fighting this unwanted war are clear and simple. For us, the war is not about oil. I would not condone the sacrifice of one human life in exchange for a billion barrels of oil. Oil may have been Saddam Hussein's objective in consuming Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, but it is not our objective.

Nor for us is the war about getting rid of Saddam Hussein. We know that Saddam Hussein is a thug who has murdered men with his own hand and brought misery to millions of his own Iraqi people, to the Kurds and now to the Kuwaitis. If he were to be deposed by his fellow Iraqis, I would rejoice. Getting rid of him personally, however, is not the objective of the war.

For us in the Labour party, the only aim of the war is the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 660 to 678, all of which require the removal of Iraq unconditionally from all of Kuwait. When that

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

specific United Nations objective has been achieved, the war can and should end. Until that objective has been achieved, to end the war would make the war itself, and the loss of life, completely pointless. Just as we must be entirely clear about why the war is being fought, so we must be equally clear about the circumstances in which it can be ended.

Mr. Winnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Saddam Hussein is responsible for the war—no one else is responsible, only he—and that he is responsible also for continuing the tragedy? It is clear that once his forces leave Kuwait the war can be brought to an end.

Mr. Kaufman: I shall come to that in a moment. I agree fully with my hon. Friend.

There are some, including some hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, who advocate that the war should end immediately, at least in a ceasefire, to enable us to explore the possibilites of a diplomatic solution. Indeed, King Hussein of Jordan has already put forward a detailed plan for such a diplomatic solution. I have the utmost respect for King Hussein. I understand the geographical and political predicament in which he finds himself and his country, and I sympathise with him.

But there is no diplomatic settlement on the agenda today that was not on the agenda last Tuesday, when Tariq Aziz made it clear that Iraq was not interested in any diplomatic solution that had been proposed so far or in any diplomatic solution that might be proposed. Indeed, this very evening we learn that Saddam Hussein has rejected a peace plan put forward by President Gorbachev, who proposed that there should be a ceasefire followed by an Iraqi withdrawal. Saddam Hussein has rejected that as well.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has said, Saddam Hussein could bring the war to an end very speedily in one of the two ways in which it is possible to bring it to an end: he could announce without any delay that he accepts the United Nations resolutions requiring him to withdraw unconditionally from all of Kuwait, and he could then withdraw under the supervision of the armed forces now operating in Saudi Arabia. I believe that at that point, if it should come, the Security Council ought to have a role in supervising compliance with its own resolutions, in enforcing the withdrawal, and in policing it after it has taken place.

The war need not go on after withdrawal has started to take place to the satisfaction of the Security Council. Such withdrawal would prevent the loss of any more lives, including Iraqi lives.

Mr. Hind: May I postulate a position that we may yet have to face? If the allies drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait—let us bear in mind his lack of reasonableness in response to every diplomatic and humanitarian approach that has been made—and if he continues to fight even when we have control of Kuwait, what will be our position? Shall we seek to remove him by driving the land forces to Baghdad, or shall we remain in Kuwait and fight him off from there?

Mr. Kaufman: If we have to fight to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, it will have to be a matter of defeating him conclusively. There would be no other way: otherwise, he would continue to fight.

It has to be said that, if Saddam Hussein does not withdraw, it will be possible to bring this war to a close only with the military defeat of Iraq. That is what I have just said to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

Ms. Short: Is it not a fact that there is one other option? Suppose there were an Iraqi coup and Saddam Hussein were overthrown. If the new Government were to indicate that they wanted a ceasefire for the purposes of withdrawal, would we not have to look at the situation all over again?

Mr. Kaufman: Of course we would. If a new regime came to power in Baghdad, and if it were seen to be in control of the country, it would in those circumstances be complying with United Nations resolutions. On that basis, provided that withdrawal were properly carried out and supervised, there would be no further need for war to continue. Certainly that would be a way of operating.

I repeat, however, that, if the military defeat of Iraq is the only way in which Iraq can be removed from Kuwait, that will be the way in which Iraq is removed. That removal, indispensable though that is, will not be enough, because this crisis has demonstrated, if it ever needed to be demonstrated, that other wars could break out in the middle east unless the United Nations seizes this moment in which its authority has been manifest to exert that authority to bring about an overall and comprehensive middle east settlement. That is why we put on the Order Paper the amendment that will be decided at 10 o'clock.

I supported the United Nations insistence that a peaceful withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait could not be linked to a middle east settlement, or even to self-determination for the Palestinians. I agree that Saddam Hussein should neither be seen to be rewarded nor even claim to have been rewarded for his aggression against Kuwait with a conference on the future of the middle east.

That question of linkage, however, ended with the first air raids on Baghdad. Just as the United Nations will get its way on insisting that Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait must be unconditional so, once the war is successfully concluded, the United Nations must pursue its other resolutions relating to a middle east settlement.

The Security Council made its position clear a month ago when it unanimously passed resolution 681. That resolution refers to an accompanying statement of the president of the Security Council concerning, as the president put it,

"the method and approach for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict."

The statement from the president referred to the reaffirmed determination of the council members

"to support an active negotiations process in which all relevant parties should participate leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace to the Arab-Israeli conflict through negotiations which should be based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) of the Security Council and which should take into account the right to security of all states in the region, including Israel, and the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people."

The president of the Security Council went on to draw attention to the agreement of the members of the Security Council that those objectives should be sought through what he called

"an international conference, at an appropriate time, properly structured."

There are reports that President Bush has assured the Israeli Prime Minister that, in recompense to the Israelis for their self-restraint in not making a military response to the wanton and unprovoked attacks on their civilian population, the United States will not agree to the convening of such a conference. I am glad that, in response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), the Prime Minister made it clear that those reports are not accurate—he repudiated them.

What has been inflicted on Israel since Friday morning makes the convening of an international conference more essential than ever and in the interests, above all, of Israel herself. My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) were right to point that out.

Israel is the strongest military power in the middle east and, proportionately to her size, is probably the strongest military power in the world. Up until Lebanon, she had never lost a war—she has never lost a war in which her existence has been threatened. She would almost certainly win a war against her strongest neighbour, Syria, and she would be equally likely to win a war against Iraq. Israel may remain invincible, but she is not invulnerable. Such a victory would be bought at a terrible price. In this new era of missile warfare even Israel's control of the skies would not spare her civilian casualties far beyond anything that she has suffered in wars so far—indeed, probably far more than all the casualties of all the wars she has fought put together. Israel is particularly sensitive about casualties.

What is more, such a victory would not bring her security. However strong her defences, some missiles could get through. Indeed, it is recognition of this bleak fact that has compelled the Israeli Government to abandon a previously inflexible principle and accept on her soil the help of foreign military personnel, accompanying the Patriot missile launchers which have been sent from the United States. The present Government of Israel have taken the view that if forced to make a choice, they would choose security without peace over peace without security. However, the Scud missile attacks on Israeli population centres have proved that such a choice is no longer available, if it ever was. The fact is that Israel cannot have security without peace.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will my right hon. Friend urge the Israeli Government to supply gas masks and other protective equipment to Palestinian Arabs in the occupied territories who are the subject of permanent curfew and face great dangers? Will he do what he can to persuade the Israeli Government to ensure that gas masks and other protective gear are issued immediately and that the curfew is lifted to enable Palestinian Arabs to try to obtain food and go about their other daily activities?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall certainly urge the Israeli Government to do that, but I must also tell my hon. Friend that Palestinians would not need gas masks if Saddam Hussein was not threatening gas warfare against Israel and other people, and if he did not have missiles which could be launched against the population and which are so indiscriminate that they are liable to kill Israeli Arabs or Palestinians as much as Israeli Jews. The solution is for Saddam Hussein not to send the missiles.

Proof of this entire situation and of Israeli vulnerability was vividly illustrated when old friends of mine, living in a village at the foot of Mount Carmel, looked out of their window in the early hours of Friday morning and saw a Scud missile going by. A few moments later, they could feel their window panes tremble as the missile exploded six miles away.

That experience and the experience of other Israelis now show that only peace can bring security to Israel. Certainly territory cannot bring that security. The Scud attacks took place even while Israel continued to occupy the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Israel would be more secure without those territories in a middle east where all the countries of the region recognised their common vulnerability and common interest in a peace settlement.

The Syrians, whose poverty-stricken economy is burdened with a huge defence bill, are realising that. The Palestinians need no persuading. Nor, I am sure, do the stricken Lebanese. Recently, Mr. Shamir has said that, once the Iraq-Kuwait crisis is over, he would be willing to talk peace, even to the Iraqis. He has offered talks to President Assad of Syria and even said that he would talk to Palestinians. He must be persuaded to accept that such talks should be conducted not bilaterally and piecemeal, but at a conference organised under the auspices of the Security Council, which would have as its basic agenda resolutions 242 and 338.

Those resolutions have been accepted as a basis for a settlement by Israel, the PLO and the League of Arab States, which made an historic declaration in accepting de facto the existence of the state of Israel at its Casablanca summit in May 1989. Six months ago in Damascus, the vice-president of Syria told me that Syria would wish to negotiate with Israel on the basis of resolutions 242 and 338.

Resolution 338 simply calls on the parties concerned to implement resolution 242 in all its parts. Resolution 242

"*Affirms* that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

(i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;

(ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for the acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force . . .

Affirms further the necessity

(a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

(b) for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;

(c) for guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones".

That agenda has waited to be discussed for nearly 24 years, and should wait no longer; but it cannot be the complete agenda. The complete agenda must include self-determination for the Palestinians, as called for in resolution 681. Although I would not have chosen the precise words that he used, I agree with Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan, who said in a letter published in today's edition of *The Guardian*:

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"Had the Palestinian Question, which stands on its own merit, been addressed before August 2 1990, no justification could have been found for the attack on Israel."

The agenda must include ridding the middle east of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and action to prevent any further nations in the region from acquiring nuclear, chemical and biological warfare capability. It must include measures to limit and control arms sales in the region—arms sales that have been an almost criminal self-indulgence by too many avaricious countries jockeying for power.

It is the Soviet Union that has made possible the Iraqi missile attacks of Israel and Saudi Arabia; it is the French who will have supplied the weapons if there are Exocet attacks on naval vessels of the coalition. And, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) pointed out, it was the British Ministry of Defence that, throughout the 1980s, provided military training for Iraqis. Not only would Iraq not be able to wage war if outside Governments had not supplied her with weapons; if she had not been sold those weapons, she would not have been able to invade Kuwait in the first place.

It is not enough for us to be grateful to our service men, although we certainly are. It is not enough for us to feel concern and sympathy for civilian populations that are under attack—and we certainly do feel such sympathy for the Saudis in Jeddah and Dhahran, and for the Israelis, so brutally exposed to attack and so apprehensive that Jews may once again be the victims of killers using gas, as so many were not so long ago. I hope that the House will understand when I say how deeply it grieves me to see, on television and in the newspapers, pictures of Jews as victims once again.

Our sympathy also goes out to the Iraqi civilians who have been the victims of Saddam Hussein for longer than any other people in the middle east. However, gratitude to our service men and sympathy for Saddam Hussein's victims will be empty if we are complacent enough and indolent enough to leave the middle east, after this war, as riven with hostility and strife as it was before 2 August 1990.

This war is a tragedy. This crisis is an opportunity. We must honour the tragedy and grasp the opportunity. The United Nations must use its newly established authority to lay the basis of a permanent peace in the middle east.

9.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): First, may I apologise to a number of right hon. and hon. Friends whose contributions I missed. I hope that they will forgive me. They will understand that although I wished to respond fully to the debate, due to the military situation I have other heavy commitments at the moment. Nevertheless, I assure all right hon. and hon. Members that I have been kept very well posted about the speeches that I did not hear.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) wants BBC World Service broadcasting to be increased. When the crisis began in August, the BBC increased its broadcasts in Arabic from nine to ten and a half hours a day. Since hostilities began, that has increased to 14 hours a day. I know that the BBC will take account of my right hon. Friend's comments and will consider extending its broadcasts, if it can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) referred to the background to the hostilities in the Gulf—the proposals in "Options for Change" and the annoucement that I made on 25 July, about a week before the invasion of Kuwait. We are continuing to study the proposals, in consultation with our NATO allies. We intend to proceed with rationalisation and other support changes in areas that do not affect our efforts in the Gulf. We shall make further announcements about our proposals in due course. I must emphasise, however, the obvious condition that I have just mentioned.

This is the fifth day of the counter-attack for the liberation of Kuwait. It is the fifth day of what my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) rightly said is an unwanted conflict. He referred to the fact that the Government and the House could not have done more in an effort to end this dispute by peaceful means and that the only other course left open to us was surrender to the aggression against Kuwait.

The feeling that we should go that extra mile, and that extra mile again, to try to achieve a peaceful solution to the dispute was the broad wish of the House; it felt that there should be the widest possible agreement among United Nations members to achieve a peaceful outcome. I respect those who hold a contrary view, but they will be the first to recognise, as I believe the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) recognised in his point of order at the beginning of the debate, that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members—reflected by the agreement between the leaders of the two main parties—agree that the course on which we embarked with great reluctance, because none of us wanted conflict, was the only one left to us in the interests of a safer world.

The hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) all reflected that approach. Just as there is agreement in the House, it is agreed in the United Kingdom and throughout the world that such gross aggresssion cannot rest unchallenged and that such a challenge to order in the world and the United Nations cannot go uncorrected.

I should like to report to the House on events to date. I repeat that this is the fifth day of this unfortunate conflict; so much has happened in recent hours and days that it is difficult to recall how recently it started. It has been marked by the start of the air campaign. My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) mentioned the vital need to reduce Iraq's military capability so that the liberation of Kuwait can be achieved with the minimum of casualties among our forces. He also mentioned the need to prosecute the campaign against Iraq's military capability while ensuring the minimum number of civilian casualties.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: I shall carry out the undertaking that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the hon. Gentleman, if he can contain himself, and shall answer his question. Instructions were given to ensure the minimum civilian casualties and to avoid damage, wherever possible, to religious and cultural sites. The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked what damage had been done to nuclear

insulations, power stations, research facilities or cooling stations. He may know that General Schwarzkopf made it clear yesterday that the attack had been on nuclear research and development facilities. He believed that those reactors had been thoroughly damaged and would not be effective for several years. The House will understand that given the activities of Saddam Hussein in recent times, given some greater awareness of the preparations that he had made and given some of the weapons that he had been developing, it must have been sensible, in the interests of regional security, to try to halt his progress to acquiring nuclear weapons.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: Perhaps I may proceed. The hon. Gentleman was promised a reply; he has now been given it.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: During the five days, we have seen——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would resume his seat. I have done him the courtesy of ensuring that he received a reply to his question. It gives us no incentive to seek to respond to his questions if he is going to continue to intervene in that way. I ask him to show greater courtesy.

The overall level of sorties that have been flown——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. King: I am not giving way. I must respond to several hon. Members. The hon. Member has taken up a fair time in this debate and in others.

Some 8,000 sorties were made during these five days. As the House knows, they were conducted with cruise missiles, precision-guided bombs and bombs against military installations and involved airfield cratering. Against the background of several questions about the effectiveness——

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. King: No. Against the background of questions which were asked previously about the effectiveness of command and control arrangements, the House will have noticed the remarkable efficiency and co-ordination of the allied air campaign in which those sorties were flown, involving—as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out—no fewer than seven countries. The United Kingdom contributed to some 350 sorties. The House is now familiar with the use of the JP233, the air-launched anti-radar missile and bombs, the Jaguars, Tornadoes, F3s and fighters, as well as the GR1s for the low-level attacks and now the GR1A reconnaissance aircraft for attacks in the west, the south and south-east of Iraq and in Kuwait.

I was not surprised to note my hon. Friends the Members for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), with their close interest in the RAF, taking understandable pride in the remarkable achievements of that service.

I must report to the House that since we last met and debated these issues, three Tornados have been lost in action and a further one was lost shortly after take-off. This has raised questions about the role of the GR1 in terms of its airfield denial capability, low-flying night attacks and the challenge that they pose. I do not think that it is any secret to those who follow these matters that the Tornado GR1 has a unique capability. We provided it for this campaign at the special request of the allies, because of that unique capability and the vital need in the early stages of the campaign to ensure that the rest of the air campaign could be carried forward with the minimum chance of interdiction or of threat from an Iraqi air force. That campaign has been carried out with the greatest courage.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to the low-flying activity and training in this country that have made possible that capability which has been shown to such good effect now. We recognise the extraordinary courage shown by the aircrews in the recent campaign.

I do not know whether the House realises that last night an assessment was made for me showing what happened when a sortie of GR1s attacked one particularly significant airfield in Iraq. The assessment was that those aircraft had to face no fewer than 25 tonnes of ammunition from conventional anti-aircraft guns, through which they successfully passed without any loss. That is a measure of the courage and determination of those aircrews. They are a vital component in ensuring that the rest of the air campaign can go forward with the minimum of casualties. That courage, which was also shown by the pilots of Jaguar aircraft and reconnaissance aircraft, backed up by the tankers, has attracted the admiration of us all.

We must remember that part of the desert shield which is in place is well represented by the Navy in the northern Gulf. HMS Gloucester and HMS Cardiff are in the front of the picket line, helping to protect the United States carriers providing the strike aircraft and the United States battleships with their Tomahawk cruise missiles which are proving so effective and accurate. The first armoured division is now preparing to move forward and is completing its final training. All those factors, backed by round-the-clock work by the ground crews, make up the team effort required to ensure that we make the most effective contribution.

Let me join my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the quality of support from industry. I do not know whether hon. Members realise how many representatives of the companies supplying equipment to our forces are out there in the Gulf at the moment. They are in the front line, within the range of Scud missiles, helping to keep the engines of our Challenger tanks going and our aircraft in the air. A very considerable number of civilians—from the constituencies of almost every hon. Member—are working, and staying at their work, despite the threats they face.

I wish to discharge my duty to the House by giving the clearest possible assessment of the progress of the campaign to date. That is especially difficult because, almost since the campaign started, we have been severely

[Mr. King]

hampered by the weather. It is most important to have an accurate image and an accurate way of identifying how many of our objectives have been achieved. I have to tell the House that, at the moment, that is extremely difficult. The whole House has seen the pictures of spectacular achievements in terms of accuracy. We have reason to believe that, contrary to some of the claims that have been made, civilian casualties have been kept remarkably low in relation to the scale of the attacks that have been made.

Mr. Nellist: On that point——

Mr. King: I am sorry. The hon. Gentleman has had a chance to make his speech and I wish to respond as clearly as I can to the contributions that have been made.

For all the remarkable achievements of the initial days of the air campaign, the House, the country and the world are starting to get a clearer picture of the scale of the war machine that has been created in Iraq and of the size of the task that still lies ahead of us. It is true that we believe that we have now achieved air superiority, but there is a clear distinction between air superiority when ones opponent's air force does not choose to fly and air supremacy in which we can be sure of our control of the skies. It is worth recognising that, although we have had considerable successes, our only certainty at the moment is that, of the 800 or so aircraft that Iraq possesses, some 20 have so far been destroyed. That clearly underlines the scale of the task that lies ahead.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. King: I am very short of time.

Should a further reminder be needed, let me say that the Scud missile clearly represents a challenge to us all. I agree with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the deliberate attempt to provoke Israel, and the strength of Israel's response. We are making every effort to identify and destroy Scud missles. It is difficult to be sure of the figures. I have been criticised for not giving accurate figures so far, but nobody is quite sure exactly how many Scud missiles and missile launchers the Iraqis have. We believe that they have some 30 fixed missile launchers and more than 20 mobile launchers. General Schwarzkopf believed that we could have destroyed as many as 16 so far, but only today we identified between eight and 10 further mobile launchers, of which we believe three were destroyed. As the House knows, I have had reports of another Scud launching tonight—at 7.19 pm—although we believe that the missile landed in the sea off Al Jubayl without causing any casualties.

The events of the past two days reveal a deliberate attempt to provoke Israel into retaliation to undermine the cohesion of the alliance. We must be very impressed by the strength of the Israeli response. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) and others drew particular attention to that and to the fact that the Israelis have been willing not to retaliate immediately and to recognise the allies' efforts to deal with the Scud missiles.

That provocation through the use of Scud missiles is probably only the first in a series of attempts by Saddam Hussein in one way or another to split the alliance or to otherwise provoke responses that will make the cohesion of the alliance more difficult to maintain. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) referred to the threat of terrorism and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set that threat in context. We are taking serious precautions about that.

Another sign of the nastiness of the regime that we face is to be seen in the announcements that have been made in the past 24 hours. Only yesterday, Saddam Hussein reassured his troops that, if they were captured in conflict, they would be treated under the terms of the Geneva convention. A man who can stand up and give his people that assurance and then treat our prisoners of war as he does is beyond contempt.

I do not know whether I was the only person, when looking at the pictures, to get the strong impression that those people were reading a prompter. There cannot be many people who believe that that was the free expression of free men able to express their own thoughts.

We have made the strongest representations again today to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the representatives of which have been here today seeking access to Iraqis who have been detained to ensure that they are receiving proper treatment. Of course, they were granted access and of course we gave them every opportunity, to which they are entitled, to visit Iraqis to see whether they are receiving proper treatment. We absolutely insist that as we make those facilities available in this country, so similar facilities must be available to representatives of the International Red Cross in Baghdad.

We have seen gross breaches of the Geneva convention. Breach No. 1 was putting prisoners on display. Coercion to say things that they might not otherwise have said freely was breach No. 2. Perhaps the most obscene breach was the use of those prisoners as human shields and their being placed at possible targets.

I am absolutely convinced that the sight of our prisoners being treated in that way does not undermine public morale. That sight reinforces the morale of people in this country that they will not give in to someone who treats our service men like that.

We are anxious to consider the future provisions for any service men and women who may be injured or killed during the current conflict. We provide for them and their families through the armed forces pension scheme and through war widows pensions. However, I know that many people, businesses and organisations may wish to show their appreciation for the men and women in our armed services who are risking their lives in this vital task.

I am therefore today setting up a Gulf Trust to which donations can be given. The Trust will be operated by the united services trustee and it will channel donations to the three service benevolent funds which, working within charity law, will distribute moneys to those in need. I have decided to adopt that approach so that there can be a single point for donations which will enable the great experience of the service benevolent funds to be used.

My overriding aim is to provide the most helpful support on a long-term basis for any people who are wounded and the families of any who may be killed. I know that many people may wish to contribute, depending on circumstances, through the trust. I am grateful to have the opportunity to make that announcement tonight.

One of the biggest challenges that we face in giving the necessary support to our troops in the Gulf is the problem of the unique circumstances that we all knew that we

would face—the first war by television. It poses very real challenges in ensuring that we have effective communications and that we keep people in this country as well informed as we can.

The hon. Members for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and for Walsall, South (Mr. George) drew attention to some of the problems that we are having in the Ministry of Defence. We have made mistakes. We will try to learn from them. The hon. Gentlemen understand that it is uniquely difficult, when we have CNN actually showing pictures of the missiles coming in and of the Patriot anti-missile missiles going out, when it is another six hours before anybody can work out whether we are seeing a successful interception, the explosion of a missile, or the successful defeat of a missile. Some of the communications challenges are very serious. I take seriously the criticisms that were made, and we shall do our best to improve.

I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) for what he said about the work of the people of the Ministry of Defence. It is very easy to write up the present conflict in terms of the brave boys in the front line and a lot of dundering bureaucrats in the Ministry of Defence—*[Interruption.]* Ministers can take the flak—they have to take the flak. I want to pay my tribute to the teamwork that is going on round the clock, right through the whole organisation at present to make sure that it is not done just by magic. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, 3,000 tonnes of supplies a day are arriving. It is not just by magic that the troops in the front line are actually able to say that they believe that, compared with the other forces there, they have the best equipment and the best organisation for the job. I should like to pay my tribute to them.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil said at the end of his speech that this is perhaps the easiest part. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) echoed that thought. We undoubtedly recognise the challenge that we face. After the first few hours of the air campaign, the first excitement and recognition of the power, sophistication and amazing skill of some of the new weaponry fooled a number of people into thinking that this would be a short and easy expedition. I think that there is now a more sober recognition in the House of the scale of the challenge to our forces and of our responsibility.

I give fair warning to the House that there may be difficult times ahead. There may be times when our fortitude will be tested. Yet I remind the House why we are here. We must show the same fortitude as was shown tonight by those pilots and those aircrew who had been out yet again—another night on another mission. All returned safely, I am happy to say. They can expect the courage that they are showing of us as well.

It is a time, as Secretary of State for Defence, to have to decide on deployments and to have to determine which units, which men and women will be sent out to the Gulf, an area of danger, and an area of great uncertainty where there is a serious threat of new weaponry and danger. I could not do that if I did not believe that the cause was just. I could not do it if I did not profoundly believe that it was right. That is why I commend our motion and the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Question put, That the main Question, as amended, be agreed to:—

The House divided: Ayes 563, Noes 34.

Division No. 40] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Anderson, Donald
Arbuthnot, James
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benton, Joseph
Benyon, W.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blair, Tony
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George J.
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*

Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grist, Ian
Grocott, Bruce
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ron
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Murphy, Paul
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patchett, Terry
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*

Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Primarolo, Dawn
Skinner, Dennis
Strang, Gavin
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Canavan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses its full support for British forces in the Gulf and their contribution to the implementation of United Nations resolutions by the multinational force, as authorised by United Nations Security Council Resolution 678; commends the instructions to minimise civilian casualties wherever possible; and expresses its determination that, once the aggression in Kuwait is reversed, the United Nations and the international community must return with renewed vigour to resolving the wider problems in the Middle East.

Departmental Select Committees

10.20 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): On behalf of the Committee of Selection, I beg to move,

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Mr. David Harris, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. David Porter and Mr. David Shaw be members of the Social Security Committee.

Mr. Speaker: With this, we may take the motion relating to the Health Committee:

That Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. James Couchman, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Alice Mahon, Sir David Price, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Audrey Wise be members of the Health Committee.

As the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is beyond the scope of the two motions, I have not selected it. *[Interruption.]*

Will those hon. Members who are not remaining for this debate please leave quietly?

Sir Marcus Fox: I am well aware that the tactics being indulged in by the Liberal Democrats, or the Scottish Liberal Democrats—I hardly dare call this an amendment—are intended to prevent these very important Committees from being set up. I wish that those hon. Members had chosen something more appropriate on which to take a stand of this kind. Following the decision to split the huge Department of Health and Social Security into two Departments, it was natural that there should be two Select Committees. I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) said during the Christmas Adjournment debate:

"A new Committee is to be set up and as a member of that Committee I must express my deep sense of frustration that the new Select Committee has been prevented from functioning by the blocking actions of some Scottish Liberals whose names are on the Order Paper. I understand that they feel strongly about the lack of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and that that has been an ongoing quarrel between them and the Government . . . I object strongly when that quarrel leads to the frustration of two other Select Committees, both of which are charged to oversee the weakest and most vulnerable members of our society."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1990; Vol. 183, c. 332.]

I am sure that my hon. Friend was right.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am grateful to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection for giving way to a fellow member of the Committee. He is underlining the frustration of prospective members of the Health Committee at being delayed for just two months. How does he think Scottish Members feel at having been held up for all of this Parliament?

Sir Marcus Fox: As the hon. Gentleman is a member of the Committee of Selection, I thought that he might have become more impassioned during the various meetings of that Committee. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that we are now in the fourth year of this Parliament. It is somewhat surprising to me that, having failed to set up the Committee in the past two years, at this late hour we should now be faced with such tactics.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Marcus Fox: Yes, I am a very reasonable guy.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Chairman of the Committee of Selection concede that if he and his Committee had done their job properly, we would not be here tonight?

Sir Marcus Fox: If the hon. Gentleman will bide his time I intend to cover briefly the history of why it was impossible to set up the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could curtail that particular discussion by pointing out that there is not one single Conservative Member representing Scotland sitting on the Benches tonight and that the failure of those Conservative Members to take up their posts on the Scottish Select Committee is the problem we face.

Sir Marcus Fox: I am the Chairman of the Committee of Selection. I am not in the Whips Office and I have no control over the attendance of hon. Members. I should have thought that the absence of Conservative Members from Scotland was proof that none of them was willing to serve on that Select Committee *[Interruption.]* I see that the most distinguished of my Scottish colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) is now present. Perhaps the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has found a volunteer and we shall have some success in establishing the Select Committee in the future.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Why not ask him?

Sir Marcus Fox: It is my intention to listen carefully to the debate. If a glint of new hope emerges that the Scottish Select Committee can be set up, I shall take careful note.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I intervene as an English Member of Parliament, despite the accent, and as a former member of the previous Select Committee on Social Services. I have a great deal of sympathy with Scottish Opposition Members. I know of the negotiations that have taken place to divide the former Select Committee into the Select Committee on Social Security and the Select Committee on Health. If half of that energy had been put into establishing the Scottish Select Committee, we would be here acknowledging that that Select Committee should be set up. This is not just a Scottish issue but a House of Commons issue. The failure to set up the Scottish Select Committee is frustrating the will of the House, and that failure is based upon party political advantage as perceived by Conservative Members.

Sir Marcus Fox: Nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to be able to set up all 14 Select Committees. It is a failure on the part of my Committee that we were unable to set up the Scottish Select Committee. However, Opposition Members should read carefully the three debates that we have had on this matter. They will then realise that that failure is not due to lack of effort on our part. I am Chairman of the Committee of Selection, which consists of Members from all parts of the House. None of them has failed to support me during our previous debates. Obviously hon. Members' memories are failing them.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, if and when a Select Committee on Health is established, should that be the will of the House, it will be free to discuss Scottish issues?

Sir Marcus Fox: I note that there is a big if, and I should rather finish my speech before——

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend. The former Select Committee on Social Services never felt the least inhibited from going anywhere within the United Kingdom. We went to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and I have no doubt that the two new Committees will do precisely the same.

Sir Marcus Fox: Indeed, and if the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) looks carefully at the work of the various Select Committees, he will see that many of them have looked at Scottish matters. The fact that there has been no Select Committee on Scottish Affairs has not stopped matters affecting Scotland being discussed by Select Committees. The record shows that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Hon. Members will not have a chance to speak, if they carry on intervening.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: The hon. Gentleman says that Scottish affairs have not missed out as a result of the failure of the House to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. How can he say that, when we have not had the facility to scrutinise and call into question Government policy on health, social security, fishing, steel and a whole variety of matters that directly affect the daily lives of the people of Scotland? Surely he must accept that the House has failed to supply us with that particular opportunity.

Sir Marcus Fox: Scottish Members have not been backward in pushing forward subjects that they want discussed in various Select Committees. It is within my recollection that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry is looking into Ravenscraig and such issues. Naturally, I understand that had there been a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, Scottish Members would have had another forum to look into these matters. The Scottish Grand Committee still exists and other Committees look at matters which affect Scotland.

After the 1987 election it took six months to set up the 13 departmental Committees. It was not the first time that there had been delays. There are delays after every general election.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Not four years.

Sir Marcus Fox: We had the first debate on 2 December 1987 and two subsequent debates. Delay followed delay. During the long, protracted discussions between the usual channels, there was much toing and froing. If only agreement had been reached earlier, the Committee could have been set up. Initially, there were objections to the Government having a majority on the Committee. It took a while before the size of the Committee was reduced from 13 to nine to allow the Government to have the majority. When Tory names were suggested, Opposition Members felt that no English Members should be allowed to make up numbers which, again, caused delays. When that principle was accepted, it was too late in the day.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The hon. Gentleman is misdirecting himself. From the beginning we made it clear that we would not stand on any narrow interpretation of the rules. We made it clear in writing at the request of the then Leader of the House, who is now the Secretary of State for Energy, that we would accept any Member from any part of the United Kingdom. The

only qualification was that such a Member should have a genuine interest in the affairs of Scotland and wish to see proper scrutiny of Government business. We also made it clear from the beginning that we would agree to reducing the size of the Committee from the largest to the smallest, if necessary. We have done everything we can. The hon. Gentleman is wholly wrong in suggesting that at any time the possibility of setting up the Committee was held out to me. I have knocked at doors repeatedly and I shall continue to knock until we receive an affirmative answer.

Sir Marcus Fox: The hon. Gentleman's memory is at fault. He has many subjects to cover. I am the Chairman of the Committee of Selection and this matter occupies much of my time. If he refers to the *Official Report* of Tuesday 22 December 1988, he will see a speech from the previous Leader of the House in which he describes fully the discussions which took place. It is surprising that all this should have gone on so long, if what the hon. Gentleman says is the case. If there had been unanimity, we could have set up the Committee quickly.

Mr. Dewar: This is, to me, a matter of some importance. The Government's position has consistently been not that they offered a suggested package of reforms that was not acceptable to the Opposition, but that they could not staff the Committee: they could not persuade Scottish Conservative Members to serve, and could not get anyone from furth of Scotland to serve. That has been the position under three Leaders of the House, and I understand that it is still the position. It is entirely inaccurate, and a complete misunderstanding of the facts, to say that at some point we were offered a deal which we refused. The only ground that I can think of for such a claim is that at one point, when no Conservative Members were coming forward, we were not in a position to put up members from the Opposition, because we elect them democratically. There was a delay of one week then, when there were no Conservative volunteers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Interventions should be brief. I remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that the debate is about the composition of the Select Committee on Social Security and Health.

Sir Marcus Fox: I stand by what was recorded in *Hansard* on 20 December 1988. At least the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has admitted that there was a bit of a delay. At one stage, there were five Conservative nominations. It is clear that we are not going to agree about what went on at the beginning of all this, but it is a fact that on 9 December——

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are discussing—as well as the composition of other Select Committees—the future of the Scottish Select Committee. Why is no Scottish Minister present?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is about the composition of the Select Committees on Social Security and Health; it has nothing to do with Scotland.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Sir Giles Shaw.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it or is it not the case that the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has not been selected? If it has not been selected, surely there is no room in order for discussion of the Scottish issue.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The issues of health and social security are of vital importance to Scotland. Surely, given the different administrative system there, it is within the rights of Scottish Members to raise with the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) how those issues will be dealt with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it is not in order.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One at a time, please.

It is not in order to discuss in detail the hypothetical issue of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. I now call Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Wallace: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may not be aware that, before you took the Chair, the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) set out to explain the history of the establishment of the Scottish Select Committee. Mr. Speaker, who was in the Chair, did not once bring him to order. Clearly that is the issue that hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to address; as the hon. Member for Shipley has been allowed to advance his case, surely other hon. Members should be allowed to do the same.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall bear the hon. Gentleman's point in mind, but this must not be a debate about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs; it must be a debate about the matters on the Order Paper. *[Interruption.]* Order. Will hon. Members listen for a moment? An obligation is placed on me to ensure that the debate is kept within the confines of the motion on the Order Paper. Now let us get on.

Sir Marcus Fox: Although we all knew the reason behind the two Committees' not being set up, I thought that I should in all fairness try to explain. I may have been misunderstood, in which case I merely wish to say that we reported to the House some two years ago that we could not set up the Committee in a way that would obtain the acceptance of the House. *[Interruption.]* Interventions have taken me much further down that road than I wanted to go. There is no reason why the two Select Committees should not be set up. The sooner they are, the better it will be for the House and the country.

10.39 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection for introducing a matter of great importance to Opposition Members generally and to Scottish Members in all parts of the House in particular. From personal contacts and correspondence with potential members of these two huge departmental Select Committees, I know that by using this procedural device we have held up their work. That was never our intention. Our intention alwayss was to obtain a short debate on the consequences of not having a departmental Select Committee to consider

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

Scottish affairs. Our amendment is technically out of order, but we have achieved something, since we are now holding a brief debate on the subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We are not holding a debate on that subject. We are holding a debate, I hope, on the motions on the Order Paper.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am responding to the way in which the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) introduced the two motions. I hope to deal with them in detail. I do not intend to dwell on an area of controversy, at the risk of being ruled out of order.

We never intended to thwart in any way the entirely logical and commendable step of splitting the Select Committee into two component parts—health and social security—and we never intended unduly to delay the work of those Committees. However, under Standing Order 6(2), the Chairman of the Committee of Selection has a duty to pay regard to the qualifications of those members who serve on the two new departmental Committees. He also has a duty under the same Standing Order to take into account the composition of the House.

Will the hon. Gentleman and the Committee of Selection now take account of the fact that no departmental Committee is considering Scottish matters? That has consequences for the qualifications of the members of new departmental Committees such as the ones that will be set up as a result of the motions. It has consequences, too, for the composition of existing Select Committees.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): The hon. Gentleman has made his point well. We all appreciate the need for a Select Committee to consider Scottish affairs. However, either intentionally or inadvertently, he has held up the important work of both Select Committees. The hon. Gentleman says that he has already made his point. Will he therefore vote for the motion?

Mr. Kirkwood: We set out with the aim of getting this important matter considered by the House. Technically we have failed, but we have succeeded to the extent that at least the Chairman of the Committee of Selection is having to account to the House for his actions. I did not intend to delay the setting up of the two new Select Committees for more than a few weeks. The hon. Member for Shipley grabbed hold of me by the scruff of the neck and made it clear in no uncertain terms that he was worried about reports that may not wholeheartedly approve of what the Government are doing. That remains to be seen. The Chairman is bound to take account of the fact that a major departmental Select Committee has not been set up. The absence of a Scottish Select Committee is in direct contravention of Standing Orders.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that in a previous debate on the composition of Select Committees the then Leader of the House suggested that Select Committees could take cognisance of the Scottish dimension? As the only Scottish member of the Transport Select Committee, and as its Chairman, I am aware that that suggestion does not work and that it is neither desirable nor practical. What is sometimes important in Scotland is not of the least interest to other Select Committee members. Liberal Democrats have done the House a service by drawing attention to the matter in their amendment.

Significantly, there is no Scottish Member on the Social Security Select Committee. How will Scottish social security problems be considered? The only Scottish Member of the proposed Health Select Committee is my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I have read previous debates in which the former Leader of the House made precisely that point. In addition, I have carefully read the excellent reports that the Social Services Select Committee has produced. I refer to the fifth report, "The Government's Plans for the Future of the NHS", and the eighth report, "Resourcing the National Health Service", in which only passing reference is made to the Scottish health service, which has a completely different structure and confronts different problems in treating diseases and illness.

Mr. Wallace: Will my hon. Friend confirm, having read the reports of the Social Services Select Committee, that although it took evidence from the Department of Health and Social Security and, latterly, the Department of Health on three occasions, there is no indication that it ever took oral evidence from the Scottish Office? Although Leaders of the House said that Select Committees were able to consider the Scottish dimension, they clearly failed to do so.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is true. There is a more fundamental flaw in the membership of the proposed Select Committee on Health. The Department of Health has responsibility for England and Wales but no responsibility north of the border, where the health service is governed by Scottish Office Ministers. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), whose interest in and record on the health service is without equal. I have every confidence in his ability as Chairman of the proposed Select Committee on Health, but that Committee will never be able to consider the health service in Scotland, except in exceptional circumstances, which is entirely unfair.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I agree with much of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but he cannot get away with his latter statement, which was inaccurate. The Select Committee on Social Services visited Scotland many times and has full authority to take evidence from whatever Minister it wishes to summon before it, including Scottish Ministers if necessary. We visited Scotland as part of our inquiries into the resourcing and structure of the health service. I congratulate Scotland on some of the excellent health care facilities that it provides. In some ways, other parts of the United Kingdom can learn from it.

Mr. Kirkwood: Perhaps I am getting carried away with my own rhetoric. I was not aware that the Social Services Select Committee had visited Scotland during an inquiry into health matters.

Mr. Winterton: It has.

Mr. Kirkwood: I stand corrected.

Sir David Price: Three of our inquiries were greatly helped by visiting Scotland: the first was on acquired immune deficiency syndrome; the second was on mental health—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman talks about regional differences. We were impressed with the way in which Edinburgh was handling matters. We were impressed with the way in which Fife was handling mental health and care in the community. On primary health care, we were impressed by the fact that in Scotland, unlike England, the general practitioner service is not separated from the hospital service. We benefited from those three inquiries. My understanding is that Select Committees are meant to operate on a United Kingdom basis, not a national basis.

Mr. Kirkwood: From memory, those were comparative studies. As a member of an all-party committee considering AIDS and as a Member who represents a constituency not far from Edinburgh, I am aware of that fact. I also acknowledge the importance of mental health provision. I again challenge the hon. Member for Eastleigh to say when he took evidence in Scotland from Scottish Office Ministers on these two major issues. As the hon. Gentleman does not wish to intervene, the point is made.

Sir David Price: Two of our advisers on the Committee were Scottish.

Mr. Wallace: That is because all the best doctors are Scottish.

Mr. Kirkwood: As my hon. Friend says, all the best doctors are Scottish—it is impossible to avoid them.

The two new departmental Select Committees will produce reports, but the absence of a Scottish Select Committee will continue. If the Committee of Selection hopes that the next election will provide extra Conservative Members from north of the border to be prospective Committee members, it has a surprise coming to it. The Government are not using their best endeavours to address the problem. The Committee of Selection should consider the long term, having regard to the fact that it can add Members to and discharge them from departmental Select Committees.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) will confirm that the Government have never put English names forward, as he is able to do. There has never been adequate consideration of the suggestion that Scots-born English Members with an interest in health or social services north of the border should serve on a Scottish Select Committee. Although that would be very much second best, it would be acceptable. That would be a high price to pay to get a Committee going, but it has never even been attempted. That sad omission is symptomatic of the way in which the Government treat the democratic process north of the border. They show scant regard and comtempt for it.

The new departmental Select Committees will have difficulty operating north of the border. The geography and ambient temperatures in Scotland mean that severe weather payments have greater significance to the population of Scotland than they do to the English population. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and others have introduced ten-minute Bills to do something about that. Many of my constituents suffer from rural deprivation, poverty and transport problems. That all has a different Scottish legislative framework, with which the Social Security Committee will find it difficult to cope.

The new departmental Select Committee will have great difficulty with the legislative basis for the enforcement procedures that are now being used for poindings and warrant sales in connection with the community charge —a very important social services issue—because it will have no real experience and no chance of communicating with those who are coping with the problems and dealing with them satisfactorily——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is it not extraordinary that for four years the Government have persisted in not setting up a Committee that might have helped them get out of the holes that they have dug for themselves? Is it conceivable that, had we had a Committee that could have looked into social security matters, specifically in Scotland, the Government could have introduced a tax relief in the Budget and forgotten about the implications for Scotland?

Mr. Kirkwood: My hon. Friend makes the point forcefully.

The Chairman of the Committee of Selection cannot let matters rest as they are. He has a duty, both in terms of the Standing Orders and in terms of everything that he has heard this evening, to look at the matter again and to see whether there are ways of making progress.

Let me make a suggestion. It is very much a second best, but at least it has the benefit of being technically in order in terms of the debate. If the hon. Gentleman cannot persuade the Government to establish a Committee that covers Scottish affairs properly, he should go out of his way to ensure that 13 extra Scots Members are added to the departmental Select Committees covering other matters. The hon. Gentleman himself made the point that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry had considered the steel industry. But that was only because of the valiant efforts of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and others. My hon. and learned Friend happened to be a member of the Committee and took the opportunity afforded to him. It took a long time and a lot of arm-twisting to get the Select Committee to undertake that crucial inquiry, which would have been undertaken as a matter of course by a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

The Chairman of the Committee of Selection says that the other departmental Select Committees can cover Scots affairs. Even if that is true, it remains the case that Scots Members are under-represented in the present composition of the Committees. It seems that we may not get a proper full-blown Select Committee on Scottish Affairs to consider the wide and unique range of public responsibilities that are undertaken by the Scottish Office in Edinburgh. That being so, the hon. Gentleman at least has a duty to look again at the composition of existing Select Committees at every stage. In future when hon. Members are being considered for, or discharged from, membership——

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Gentleman has been suggesting that Scottish Members are not contributing to the Select Committees of the House.

Mr. Kirkwood: No.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should listen carefully to what I am saying. As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that we should take on board the principle that Scottish Members should be members of the United Kingdom Select Committees. Does the hon. Gentleman realise just how many Scottish Labour Members—given the circumstances of the Labour party—represent English and Welsh interests not only on the Front Bench but in the Select Committees? They do so quite properly; I am not arguing about that. The point that I am making is that it is nonsense to suggest that Scotland is not represented on the Committees.

Mr. Kirkwood: Hon. Members on both sides of the House would be more prepared to listen to the hon. Gentleman if he were willing to serve on the Scottish Select Committee, which patently he is not.

The point that I am trying to argue may be above the hon. Gentleman's head; if we are consistently to be denied a Scottish Select Committee—perhaps into the next Parliament—because the Government claim that there are difficulties and are not using their best offices to produce such a Committee, the Chairman of the Committee of Selection has a duty and a moral responsibility to examine carefully the balance of Scots Members on the existing departmental Select Committees. If he is not prepared to do that, he has a duty to ensure that the Government do the proper thing and come forward with English members. I was surprised recently to discover that the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs now does not have an in-built Government majority. It is operating in a way that we were told could never happen in Scotland. If it is good enough for the Welsh, why is it not good enough for the Scots in terms of the Committee's composition?

The Government and the Chairman of the Committee of Selection have not properly addressed a whole series of issues. The purpose of this debate and of our amendment, which may have been incompetent and technical, is to flush out those issues. We shall return to the matter again. We are too responsible to hold up the work of these two important departmental Select Committees for very much longer, but we will return to the issue in other ways until we get what we need—a proper Select Committee to deal with Scottish affairs.

11 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): It may be helpful if I intervene briefly to support the motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox). As the House knows, the Standing Order amendments to establish separate Select Committees related to the Department of Health and to the Department of Social Security with effect from the start of this Session were agreed by the House on 19 October. The motions to set up those Select Committees were agreed by the House on that occasion without debate.

The motions in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley are the next stage in the sequence of events required to bring those Committees into operation. The motion that was passed on 19 October, which was accepted by the House without debate and without objection, created the framework, and the motions tonight, if passed, provide the members to carry out that important work.

I want now to refer to the justification for the motion before the House. The creation of the two Select Committees is a logical and desirable consequence of the division in the summer of 1988 of the former Department of Health and Social Security into two separate Departments. I want to emphasise the importance of the two Committees. The Department of Health and the Department of Social Security account for 50 per cent. of public expenditure. Select Committees are set up to examine, among other things, the application of public expenditure. It is a very important role of the House to scrutinise public expenditure.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): What about Scotland?

Mr. MacGregor: I am coming to that.

We are tallking about 50 per cent. off public expenditure. As a member of the Government, I believe that it is important that a Department's work is subject to the oversight and accountability of Parliament that underlies the Select Committee system. That is the key and only issue before the House tonight.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I am delighted that these motions have finally appeared before the House. Ever since the departmental split took place, the Liaison Committee has argued that the Select Committee concerned should also be divided, not least for the reasons that my right hon. Friend gave in his opening remarks.

None the less, there has been a very long delay—from when the Department was split until the present date—and as a result, scrutiny has not been as effective as it might have been. Will my right hon. Friend state categorically that, in future, if there is any change in departmental structure, there will be a corresponding change in the Select Committee system, allowing the Committees to complete their existing inquiries, so that there will not be the kind of delay that we have experienced on this occasion?

Mr. MacGregor: I obviously cannot bind all future Governments and Leaders of the House, but my right hon. Friend has made a good point from a position of great responsibility in relation to Select Committees. He also makes a good point about the delay that has occurred, not only from his point of view, but from that of the Procedure Committee.

The amendment to Standing Orders to establish the two new Committees was approved a week before publication of the Procedure Committee's report on the working of the Select Committee system. It is important to note that the Committee endorsed the idea, as my right hon. Friend has, of having two Committees to reflect the departmental structures. That is the germane point that we are debating tonight. It is an important point in relation to those two Departments, which account for such a large part of public expenditure.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Surely one is interested in the whole proceedings of the House. However, may I remind hon. Members what the Procedure Committee recommended? It stated that there should be no break in continuity of the Select Committee system as a result of the decision. Accordingly, we recommended that the necessary motion should be framed in such a way that the nomination of the two Committees immediately follows the abolition of the Social Services Committee. We recommended that that should be done in time for the two Committees to be in place and functioning at the start of the Session. Whatever may be said about a Scottish Grand Committee and a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, two wrongs will not make a right.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has made——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: It is right that I should respond to my hon. Friend in his capacity as Chairman of the Procedure Committee, to which I have just referred. My hon. Friend has raised that point before, and I have told him that I agree with him. I am sure that it was raised in the debate on the Christmas Adjournment by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). I said then that, if the formation of the two Committees continued to be frustrated in such a way, I would provide time for a debate at the earliest opportunity.

That is what I have done. That is why we are here tonight. I am fulfilling the commitment that I gave then. I am responding to the Chairman of the Liaison Committee and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. I should have thought that the whole House would expect to have Select Committees to examine two such major aspects of public expenditure. I hope that those on the Opposition Front Bench will also support that view; it will be interesting if they do not support the formation of two such important Committees.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: The Leader of the House quite rightly referred to accountability for public expenditure. Does he therefore accept that health and social security are two major aspects of expenditure within Scotland, and that we too should have the right to scrutinise that aspect of the functions of the Scottish Office?

The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned drawing up Standing Orders to ensure that Select Committees on health and social services are established, but how can he reconcile that with Standing Order No. 130, which committed the House to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs?

Mr. MacGregor: Let me deal with some of those points. They enable me almost to say all that I wanted to say, as I promised to make a brief intervention. First, as the hon. Lady knows, social security is a United Kingdom matter. In fact, the Select Committee on Social Security will examine the position in Scotland as well. We are seeing, in effect, the deprivation of these matters being considered by a Select Committee in relation to Scotland as well as elsewhere.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: May I finish my reply to the hon. Lady?

Secondly, we are debating the two other matters, not a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): We should be.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) says that we should be. The motion is about the setting up of the two Select Committees. It is misguided——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: May I finish my sentence? It is misguided and irrelevant to attack the setting up of these two Committees on the basis of the difficulties of setting up another Select Committee.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: It is exactly on the point of the composition of the Committee and the specific motion that the debate is moving into a matter of specific concern. It is ironic that the Health Committee, which deals exclusively with England and Wales, has one Scottish Member, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). The Social Security Committee, which deals with the United Kingdom, has no Scottish Member. If there is so much concern about Scottish issues, how could the Committee of Selection put forward names that included not one Scottish hon. Member? That means that the motion is wholly unsatisfactory.

Mr. MacGregor: That is hardly a matter for me. I think it would be regarded as rather strange if the Leader of the House were to dominate the way in which the membership of Select Committees was decided. However, it is a matter for me to ensure that we move ahead with the formation of these two committees. It seems to me that the approach of hon. Members who are objecting to this is that, if one issue which is full of difficulties cannot be resolved, then another issue—namely, the two Committees that we are trying to set up tonight—which is wholly unconnected and involves no difficulties, cannot be resolved either. I think that is misguided, irrlevant and rather petty-minded. It is neither liberal or democratic. The Scottish Liberal Democrats have been raising this matter, but I do not think it is either a liberal or democratic way to approach it.

I do not want to be drawn into the issues about the Scottish Select Committee tonight, because it is irrelevant to the debate, and the amendment has not been chosen. Therefore, it is out of order.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not give way now, because I think it is time that we came to a conclusion on this matter. It really does not make sense, nor is it in the interests of this House to prevent the setting up of two select committees covering so much of public expenditure because of difficulties with another committee.

I would point out to the House that other departmental Select Committees that have been set up can take and have taken evidence from Scottish Departments on Scottish matters as part of inquiries relating to Great Britain or the United Kingdom as a whole. In 1989, the Scottish Office provided evidence in 11 different Select Committee inquiries, and in 1988 it provided evidence in 13 out of 23 Select Committee inquiries. If the amendment were allowed to be voted on and were carried, the House would be effectively deprived of the opportunity to have Select Committees on this major area of public expenditure—not least, in Scotland itself. These two Committees should be formed as soon as possible, so that they can begin their work in these very important areas.

I note that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that he would not continue his opposition for much longer. I hope that he will not carry it beyond tonight, and that the House will vote in favour of setting up the membership of these Committees.

11.13 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I begin with what has been agreed. At least the history of this matter is agreed. The old Department of Health and Social Security was divided in 1988. On 19 October 1990, the House approved without a Division a motion that, with effect from the beginning of the next Session of Parliament, Standing Order No. 130 should be amended in order to establish separate Select Committees for the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security. Today we are considering the motions from the Committee of Selection to establish the membership of the two Committees. At least that much is agreed. All this has been agreed without any major differences of opinion across the Floor of the House.

At the outset, I point out that the Opposition have no objection in principle to the Committees being established. We support the proposals. I hesitate to intrude in Scottish affairs, not least because my hon. Friends from north of the border are well capable of looking after themselves.

As we are discussing the matter, and debating with the Chairman of the Committee of Selection the establishment of Select Committees, the House has a rare opportunity to look at the way in which that Committee, and the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) as its Chairman, discharge their duties.

The House has a duty to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. That is not an option or something that the House can take or leave. That duty remains unfulfilled and the Leader of the House, like his predecessor, and the Chairman are in clear and continued breach of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons in failing to complete the procedures for the establishment of such a Committee.

Mr. Higgins: The hon. Gentleman has said that he accepts the motions. Will he make it clear that he also accepts the principle underlying them, which is that, if a departmental structure changes, the Select Committee

should change correspondingly? This is an all-party matter and it is important that, on such points of principle, we have agreement across the Floor of the House.

Dr. Cunningham: I am sorry to have to remind the right hon. Gentleman that I said that we accepted the principle and we support the proposals.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): As the Labour party has accepted the principle that there should be Select Committees, will the hon. Gentleman recall that, although expenditure in Scotland has not been properly scrutinised for four years, expenditure in Northern Ireland has not been properly scrutinised for just short of 19 years? Is not that a scandal?

Dr. Cunningham: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the House has a duty to establish a Select Committee to consider that subject, in which he has a natural interest, that is an important point.

We are well past the midpoint of this Parliament, and the situation remains unsatisfactory. There is no precedent, under any Government of any party, for the Committee of Selection and the Leader of the House failing to establish a Select Committee in such circumstances. The matter has been pressed again and again by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), other Scottish colleagues and hon. Members in other political parties.

I was rather amused to hear the Chairman of the Procedure Committee make a plea for no break in continuity in the scrutiny of the Departments of Health and of Social Security. It is a bit of a joke for him to say that, when he has been silent about the three-year break in continuity in the scrutiny of public expenditure in Scotland. The Leader of the House has said, and I agree, that the principal object of the establishment of Select Committees is to scrutinise public expenditure, but what about Scotland? What about the £10 billion annual expenditure by the Scottish Office? Why is that not being scrutinised?

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I know that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the House. He said that the Procedure Committee recommended that two Committees should be established when the Select Committee on Health and Social Services was done away with, but has made no recommendation about Scotland. As he knows, that is untrue. Paragraphs 270 and 271 of that report stress the need for there to be reconsideration of the appointment of a Scottish Grand Committee. Let us get the balance right.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is getting confused between Grand Committees and Select Committees, and about what I said. I did not accuse the Committee of not making that recommendation. I drew attention to its stressing of the importance of continuity in the work of Select Committees. If that is a valid argument in respect of the Departments of Health and of Social Security, it is an equally valid argument in respect of Scottish affairs.

It is very difficult to find the culprit when discussing all this and seeking advice with the Clerks. Reading the Standing Orders of the House, it seems that one is passed around in a circle between the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, the Leader of the House, the Government Chief Whip and, to a much lesser extent, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. They all have one thing in common: they are all members of the governing Tory party. What we have here, and continue to see, is the continual passing of the buck from the Front Bench to the Back Benches to the Government Whips Office—and round and round it goes.

The reality is that this Government, for political reasons and for no other purpose, are failing in their duty to the House. If the hon. Member for Shipley really thought a lot about his own position and his duty to the House, he would resign. I do not say this in any personal sense. I have a certain fondness for the hon. Gentleman, as he knows, in personal terms, but he and his Committee have failed totally to carry out their duties under the Standing Orders of the House. That is what they are appointed to do and have failed lamentably to do for almost four years.

I said that I hesitated to get involved in these affairs. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) fondly refers to Geordies as Scots with their brains bashed out. My response was that in some cases it would not be a very long job.

Sir Marcus Fox: As the hon. Member suggests I might resign—and quotes Standing Order 130 as his justification—could I refer him to column 339 of *Hansard* of 20 December 1988, in which the previous Leader of the House gives the exact ruling as to why there is no compulsion on my Committee to set up the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? There are ways in which that Standing Order can be dealt with, and the explanation is to be found there.

Dr. Cunningham: That illustrates my point. The hon. Gentleman says it is not the responsibility of his Committee; the Leader of the House says it is not his responsibility. What is the purpose of the House having a Standing Order which no one will accept the responsibility for implementing? That is the reality. Although we have no opposition to the proposals that are before the House from the Committee of Selection, we take the gravest exception to the failure of the Government, the Leader of the House, the Chairman of the Committee of Selection and the governing party to match up to their duty under the Standing Orders of the House.

11.23 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): We should be clear as to the terms we use in this debate. I get slightly concerned when the Chairman of the Committee of Procedure appears to be unable to differentiate between the Scottish Grand Committee, which exists, and the Scottish Select Committee, which has a totally different role. I understand that it is very easy to make slips of the tongue, and so long as it is a slip I shall accept it. But it is clear that what we are discussing is Select Committees on departmental issues. Such committees have the responsibility not just of examining public expenditure, not just of interrogating, investigating or questioning Ministers, but of overseeing many subsidiary agencies, and indeed they are entitled to discuss any issues on the subject matter before them.

What is before us, strictly, is the naming of Members to serve on the two Select Committees. We are entitled to question the priority of the motions before us, especially since a great deal of heat has been generated about this

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

subject. When an hon. Member complained about the delay in setting up these two Committees, the Leader of the House became extremely agitated. I have not seen him so acerbic in his role as Leader of the House since he reached that office. I have never seen him so excited. But he was excited over what? It was over the fact that since October last year we have been waiting for the establishment of these two Committees.

What does the right hon. Gentleman think Opposition Members feel about the Scottish Select Committee? Three years have passed, and nothing has been done. The Leader of the House has said, "It is difficult; it is hard to know what to do." Different methods have been adopted and all sorts of excuses have been trotted out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, the matter has been referred to the Leader of the House, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the Liaison Committee, the Selection Committee, the Government Chief Whip and back again to the Leader of the House. We know, of course, that these individuals and Committees are faced with tremendous responsibilities.

Paragraph 271 of the report of the Procedure Committee puts the matter in a nutshell. It states:

"Moreover, the absence of a Scottish Affairs Committee leaves a major Government Department unscrutinised and thus constitutes a deficiency (some would consider a serious deficiency) in the departmentally-related Committee system."

In the face of that, it is no use anyone on either side of the House arguing that the affairs of the Scottish Office or Scottish departmentally related divisions can be adequately covered by other Committees. If that were not so, the Procedure Committee would not have made its tremendously strong recommendation. Nor would it have gone on to ascribe blame. It makes it clear that an insufficient number of Conservative Members who represent Scottish constituencies are willing to serve on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. It agrees with the Chairman of the Liaison Committee that the cause of the problem is political and so must be its solution. It adds:

"The House is entitled to look to the Leader of the House to continue to search for a solution, which may require compromise on all sides."

We have sought in many ways to achieve a compromise. I understand those who say, "Let us get on with what already exists. Let us get on with major issues of health and social security." There are health issues in Scotland which have been dealt with in a way that beggars the imagination. For example, it has not been possible to examine Grampian health board's decision to hand over the running of a hospital for geriatric patients—it was built by the board and paid for by the Scottish Office—to a private medical company. Whether that was the right decision—I happen to think it was not—it has been taken. It has been mirrored by decisions of the other boards, and such decisions need to be examined.

Trust status is being considered for some major hospitals in the national health service. Arguments in favour of that status are being advanced in a way that has led to a fog of confusion. Decisions on whether to apply for trust status are being made on inadequate information about finance. The chairman of the unit medical committee of the Foresterhill site he said that, if it is decided to remain within a direct management unit service, an essential £11·7 million will not be made available. If it is decided to opt for trust status, however, a magic formula will be implemented and the money will become available. It seems that it will be possible to borrow the money. It must be important that those who make the decisions know precisely what is involved.

If the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs investigated these matters, decisions would be made on the basis of what is best for the patient. It is that which we are being denied. It is no good the Leader of the House and Conservative Back-Bench Members becoming agitated when decisions on the health service in England and Wales, and partially in Scotland, are being delayed. I accept that some issues may have to be looked into, but must we meekly accept the situation?

I have only one quarrel with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who opened for the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Gentleman says that he has no desire to thwart the setting up of these Committees. I do not want to do that either. However, if there is no other way to make Government Members aware of the serious deficiencies that we have tolerated for the past three and a half years, we shall thwart them to the very last moment.

11.31 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I shall be very brief. Following the remarks of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), I must appeal to the House not to make three errors instead of one. There cannot be any hon. Member who does not accept that there is a need for a Select Committee to look after the affairs of the Department of Health.

Mr. Robert Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been drawn to my attention that the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) is a director of a company called Care Services Group. If my recollection is faulty, I shall certainly apologise, but I understand that that company has taken over the contract to provide geriatric services in Aberdeen. Is that so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's membership will be recorded in the Register of Interests. Hon. Members might take this issue up during the debate, but it is not a matter for the Chair.

Sir Peter Emery: There cannot be any hon. Member who does not believe that there ought to be a Select Committee to deal with health matters, and one to deal with matters relating to social security. However, we should be cutting off our noses to spite our faces if, because there is not a Scottish Grand Committee—*[Interruption.]* It would be odd if, because there is not a Scottish Social Services Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "A Scottish Select Committee."] It would be odd if, because there is not a Scottish Select Committee, we should decide not to appoint Select Committees to deal with health matters and matters relating to social security. The Procedure Committee tried hard to ensure that this error would not occur. To that end, it recommended dovetailing in order that work might continue without interruption.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North has made it absolutely clear that nobody could accuse the Procedure Committee of not taking extremely seriously the question of a Scottish Affairs Select Committee. We have made it quite clear that this is a gap in the system of Department-related Select Committees. I should like to refer to the recommendations that the Procedure

Committee made. We stated quite clearly that, in respect of this matter, the power of initiation must lie with the Government. Hon. Members are entitled to look to the Leader of the House to continue to search for a solution.

Some of the problems that existed when we were taking evidence for our report have been overcome or simply no longer exist. I think that I should be going a very long way towards having the wishes of the House fulfilled if I could persuade the Leader of the House to say yet again that he will look into the matter and discuss it with the parties to see whether a solution might be found.

The arguments against the appointment of the two Committees are based upon a desire to have a Scottish Grand Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "Select Committee."]—yes, I am sorry but that desire is not part of today's debate.

If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House could assure the House that he will reconsider the matter, that would go a long way towards getting something done.

11.34 pm

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): I speak as the last Chairman of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs—the way things are going, I shall make the "Guinness Book of Records" as just that.

I am glad to see the hon. Members for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) present tonight. They are previous members of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and I trained them to speak up for Scotland.

I have a great respect for the Leader of the House, because he comes from the small mining village of Shotts. On this occasion, I am afraid that he is not speaking up for that village: he is speaking for the Tory Government, who have power only in England, not in Scotland. I appeal to the right hon. Gentleman to remember that he belongs to the small village of Shotts in Lanarkshire. He should speak up for Scotland and set up the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs.

All Select Committees monitor the work of Ministers and Departments. The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs monitored the work of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Office. As Chairman of that Committee, I can confirm that we worked closely with the previous Secretary——

Mr. David Marshall: My hon. Friend worked hand in hand with him.

Mr. Lambie: I am afraid that I must agree with my hon. Friend. The Committee worked hand in hand with the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger). I saw that right hon. Gentleman earlier behind the Chair, but when he saw what was happening, he beat a hasty retreat.

The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs worked well, because it not only monitored the work of the Secretary of State and the Scottish Office, but gave the Secretary of State the ammunition and evidence he needed to produce before Cabinet Sub-Committees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All this is a long way from the motion before the House.

Mr. Lambie: I am trying to show the importance of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. Surely that is relevant to the debate.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I was the Chairman of that Select Committee before my hon. Friend. Does he agree that every recommendation it made was accepted by the Government?

Mr. Lambie: I agree. I followed in the tradition of my hon. Friend. I was there to co-operate. Although we had a majority of Labour Members of Parliament representing and a Conservative Secretary of State. We had to co-operate with him to get the best possible deal for Scotland, and we did just that. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Ayr for working with us, sometimes against his friends in the Conservative party who served on that Select Committee. We worked on the basis that what was good for Scotland was good for the Select Committee.

This is where what I am saying becomes relevant, because we are talking about an existing Select Committee being divided into two Select Committees. When we discussed the future of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs I suggested to the Government, as I suggest to the Leader of the House tonight, that, with 13 Members, it was too big. During a public sitting, every Member of Parliament wanted to speak because the press were present. *[Interruption.]* A Minister who came before the Select Committee got off easily, because——

Mr. David Marshall: My hon. Friend protected him.

Mr. Lambie: I might have protected the Secretary of State for Scotland because, like me, he was speaking for the future of Scotland and Scottish interests. Sometimes, Tory Secretaries of State for Scotland are the best supporters of Labour party policy that we can get in the House. *[Laughter.]*

I used to point out to the Select Committee that, if all 13 Members wanted to question and argue with a Minister who was to appear before us, and that Minister had ability, as the right hon. Member for Ayr had, it was like coming to a holiday camp. It was no problem and there was no investigation. Whenever we had difficulty forming a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I recommended, against the advice of my Front Bench, that instead of 13 Members, the Select Committee should be composed of five—three Conservative and two Labour Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Question before the House concerns the composition and appointment of Members to two Select Committees. The hon. Gentleman is a long way from that.

Mr. Lambie: I am drawing on my experience to show the two new Select Committees that are about to be set up that the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was too big. I am suggesting that they too may be too big. With five Members, as I recommended, we could have had discussions, and the hon. Members for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) could have joined the Committee and spoken up for Scotland.

I again suggest to the Leader of the House that, if we cannot form a Committee of 13, we should form a Committee of five. I am willing, again, to act as its Chairman.

11.43 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate being called, especially in the light of the previous contribution. I remind the House that there are parties other than the Conservative and Labour parties. It may be that they could work out a cosy club.

I speak in favour of the motions before the House. The Committees have been far too long in being set up. I represent part of the kingdom which has a different health service and I realise that we have our difficulties. In a few weeks' time, a health order will come before the House which will not be properly scrutinised. There is no way presently in which a Select Committee in Northern Ireland can do the work of this House.

I have every sympathy with my Scottish colleagues. That will come as no surprise: Scotland is the land of the Scoti—the Irish, and I speak as an Ulster Scot. I feel, however, that a little local difficulty has got out of proportion. Two large Committees covering two responsible areas of government should have been in operation two months ago; moreover, four years have gone by with no Scottish Select Committee. I trust that the complaints about that will reach you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you represent the interests of Back Benchers, and that the Leader of the House—who is concerned with the conduct of the House's business—will bear in mind the fact that a large Government Department has not been scrutinised for 19 years. The time is long past when Departments were scrutinised by Select Committees.

I have no intention of delaying the House. I simply support the motions and plead with the House, as a democratic forum, to abide by its conscience and give the people of Northern Ireland their proper rights.

11.45 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Earlier, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Amery), Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, said that the absence of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs constituted a noticeable gap. It is not only a noticeable gap, but an unacceptable and very undemocratic one. We have experienced nearly four years of camouflage, obfuscation and different arguments from the Government about why they cannot set up the Scottish Select Committee, which is essential if we are to scrutinise what happens in our nation.

The purpose of the motions is to establish two Select Committees. I strongly support the presence of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on the Select Committee for Health—not least because of his inestimable work on behalf of the disabled, not only in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom—but I am sure that he will agree that more Scottish Members should serve on the Committee. Moreover, no Scottish Member has been appointed to the Select Committee on Social Security.

Conservative Members have made it plain that they consider the arrangements appropriate; Opposition Members greet that view in a spirit of argumentative disagreement. You may have been surprised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the vehemence of the Opposition's arguments. They reflect our strong sense of indignity, following the denial of Scotland's right to take her proper part in the scrutiny of legislation.

It has been pointed out that Select Committees will take evidence from Scottish Office Ministers. The Government recognise that we can offer a certain expertise in health and social security matters, and also that our administrative set-up is very different. Let me tell them that we find it extremely insulting when people pose as one-day experts on the problems that we face in Scotland. Geographical differences exist in regard to health: in the highlands and islands, for instance, the distances involved in ensuring that our constituents have access to good health facilities mean extra expenditure.

Many English Members of Parliament say that too much money is spent on Scotland's health service. They ought instead to work for an improvement in the facilities offered by the national health service to all people in the United Kingdom. Moreover, they take no account of the fact that Scottish universities make an important contribution to the NHS by training doctors who practise not only in Scottish hospitals but in hospitals throughout the United Kingdom and, indeed, throughout the world. That, however, is treated as purely Scottish expenditure.

No account is taken of Scotland's contribution to health service research. Reference was made earlier to the work that has been done in Scotland to help AIDS sufferers. I think in particular of the work done by Professor Jarrett at Glasgow university. Unfortunately, Edinburgh has become the AIDS capital of Europe. We need to do more research into AIDS, but the money for it has not been provided. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to the privatisation of the national health service, not least within the area of the Grampian health board.

No real attention has been paid to the need for extra heating payments to be made during severe weather conditions to people in the north and north-east of Scotland. Our climate and weather should lead to higher automatic payments being made. Scotland also suffers from higher levels of unemployment than England. That deserves scrutiny, too. The failure to appoint Scottish Members to serve on the social security Select Committee is very aggravating to the people of Scotland. I hope, therefore, that the House will reconsider that point.

It being one and a half hours after the motion was entered. upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [18 January], to put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection, relating to Health.*

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 33.

Division No. 41] **[11.51 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cope, Rt Hon John
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Couchman, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Cran, James
Beggs, Roy	Cunningham, Dr John
Benton, Joseph	Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Bright, Graham	Day, Stephen
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Devlin, Tim
Browne, John *(Winchester)*	Dixon, Don
Burt, Alistair	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Butler, Chris	Dover, Den
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Emery, Sir Peter
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Carrington, Matthew	Evennett, David
Carttiss, Michael	Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Channon, Rt Hon Paul	Fallon, Michael
Chope, Christopher	Favell, Tony
Conway, Derek	Fenner, Dame Peggy
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Flynn, Paul

Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Michael, Alun
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
O'Hara, Edward
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
McAllion, John
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Malcolm Bruce.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Mr. David Harris, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. David Porter and Mr. David Shaw be members of the Social Security Committee.

Resolved,

That Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. James Couchman, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. David Hinchcliffe, Alice Mahon, Sir David Price, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Audrey Wise be members of the Health Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ARMED FORCES BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes be discharged from the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill and that Mr. Julian Critchley be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

12.2 am

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier this evening, I drew attention on a point of order to the fact that I believed that the Care Services Group had a contract for private work in the health service in the Grampian region and that the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) had a business interest in that company. I have checked the record and I find that I am totally wrong. The company is not the Care Services Group but Community Health Care, with which the hon. Gentleman has no connection. I therefore unreservedly withdraw my earlier remarks. I hope that no one infers any disrespect for the hon. Gentleman's interests from what I said earlier.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for his graciousness.

Child Dependency Additions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

12.3 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): This is an extraordinary story of how 192,000 families are about to be cheated by the Government, and about families who have been cheated over the past 10 years. The cheating is as sure as if their pockets had been picked or their purses rifled. The theft is official, subtle and almost invisible, because it is hidden under a tangle of complex regulations. Fortunately, there is still time for the Government to repent or for revolt by their Lordships to stop this happening. If the measure goes through, many of the most deserving people in the land—more than 100,000 of them on invalidity benefit, 18,000 of them pensioners and 60,000 of them widows—will lose substantially.

All those people are now receiving child benefit, but they will not receive the £1 a week embarrassment bonus which was heralded by a great blare of trumpets and trombones in the 1990 autumn statement. That famous occasion will be well remembered in the House. In the death throes of her premiership, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) agreed to bestow £1 a week on first-born children as an act of atonement for her sabotage of child benefit in the past. It was a vain attempt, perhaps, to prolong her doomed premiership.

The matter is unavoidably complex. Support for families receiving basic maintenance benefits such as widows' and mothers' allowances, invalidity benefit and retirement pensions takes two forms. They receive child benefit in the same way as any other family. However, it has always been recognised that child benefit is not sufficient for all the needs of the child, so a child dependency increase is paid in addition. What matters is the combined value of child benefit and child dependency increase, described in a recent parliamentary answer as the overall level of support payable for the child.

Child benefit is now £7·25 per child, and child dependency increase is £9·65—a total overall level of support of £16·90. A written parliamentary answer on 17 June 1980 revealed the rather extraordinary news that the overall level of support in November 1979, at April 1990 prices, was £23·05. It has fallen steadily to its present level of £16·90. Expressed as a percentage of average gross weekly earnings, the figure is even more startling: it has fallen from 9·7 to 5·7 per cent.—in other words, by almost 50 per cent. The reason for that unjust drain on the value of the benefit is a change in the method of calculating the annual child dependency increase which took place in 1980. Apparently very few people were aware of it.

The simple, rational, defensible method used by all parties up to 1979 to calculate child dependency increase was as follows. The first step was to calculate the increase in the overall level of support needed to restore its value, taking into account the increase in prices—or, under the last Labour Government, the increase in earnings—since the previous uprating. The second step was to deduct from that overall increase the uprating, if any, of child benefit. The third step was to uprate the child dependency increase by the difference. In that way, whether the value of child benefit was maintained, increased or reduced, the overall level of support for the children of widows, long-term sick and pensioners was fully protected.

Clearly, the second stage in the calculation—deducting any increase in child benefit—made sense only if the starting point of the calculation was the overall level of support, including child benefit itself. Since 1980, however, that has no longer been the case. The method now used was explained in a written answer on 17 January: the first step is to calculate what the child dependency increase would be if the general uprating percentage were applied and the second is to deduct any cash increase in child benefit.

The absurdity of that method can be shown by a simple hypothetical example. Suppose that child benefit and child dependency increase were both £10 per child, making a total of £20, and that, in the year in question, prices had risen by 10 per cent. Suppose that the Government decided to do the right thing and uprate child benefit and child dependency increase in line with prices, giving a new rate of £11 for each—a total of £22 per child. Under the present fraudulent formula, the £1 increase in child benefit would be deducted from the child dependency increase, leaving it at £10, and the new overall level of support would be £21 instead of £22. That is an increase not of 10 per cent., but of 5 per cent. and that is why the erosion of the benefit has continued since 1980. To produce a 10 per cent. overall uprating, the child dependency increase would have to be increased by 20 per cent. to a full £12 so that there would still be £11 left after deducting the £1 increase in child benefit.

One wonders what kind of Machiavellian brain could have produced that formula. The best that can be said about it is that it does not appear to be illegal. However, if anyone other than the Government were to try to pull such a confidence trick, I am sure that that person would be up on a charge of fraud.

Child dependency increases are included in the list of benefits that the Secretary of State is required by section 63 of the Social Security Act 1986 to uprate annually. However, the minimum requirement applies only to child dependency increases and not to child benefit or to the overall level of support. The Secretary of State for Social Security can comply with the law simply by uprating the child dependency increase in line with prices even if the child benefit is frozen, as it has been over the past three years, and the overall level of support is cut. To make matters worse, in any year in which child benefit is uprated, section 17 of the Child Benefit Act 1975 allows the Secretary of State to deduct whatever amount he thinks appropriate to take account of the uprating of child benefit.

That provision was included in law originally as it was intended by a Labour Government in 1975 to be used only when child benefit was increased by more than the normal uprating—that was a possibility in those days. However, successive Conservative Secretaries of State since 1980 have perversely used the provision as a pretext for deducting every increase in child benefit from the child dependency increase. Although that is within the law, it is plainly indefensible in principle.

Before November 1980, and including the first Tory Government uprating in 1979, neither Labour nor Conservative Secretaries of State abused their power in that way, although the law as it stood then would have allowed them to do so. It is therefore not necessary to change the law in order to revert to the simple, fair and rational principle followed by all Governments before 1980. All that is necessary is for the Secretary of State to

stand up to the Treasury, where I am sure the present policy originates. In my experience, Social Security Ministers are reasonable, well-meaning people trying to break out from the straitjacket of meanness imposed on them by Treasury Ministers.

From the bad of the past, we come to the worse of the present. The April 1991 uprating is different in two ways. First, for one-child families—and only for those families—the £1 increase in child benefit is slightly more than is needed to compensate for the 10·9 per cent. rise in prices over the past year. Eighty pence would have been enough to restore the value of child benefit for the first child. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the other 20p should be knocked off the child dependency increase uprating—although, after what has happened since 1980, allowing the long-term sick and the widows to keep their 20p would not seem to be over-generous. To deduct the £1 from the child dependency increase is iniquitous.

The second difference in the 1991 uprating is that the £1 cannot be deducted from the child dependency increase without a change in the law. The reason for that is that there is only one child dependency increase rate for all children, and the uprating order cannot introduce a lower rate for the first child only. I understand that the Government intend to get round that difficulty by the dubious device of amending the overlapping benefits regulations. That device might well be unlawful. It is certainly wrong in principle and it must be challenged.

The case for allowing widowed mothers, pensioners and the long-term sick to get the full benefit of the child benefit uprating is even stronger this year than in previous years. One special group who are clearly on our minds at the moment are war widows. To the surprise of many hon. Members, we heard that a special fund is to be set up—the Gulf Trust. One would have thought that, if the Government had shown a better regard for war widows over the years—they certainly have not done so for that category, although they have taken certain benign decisions elsewhere—perhaps there would not be a need for such a Gulf Trust. Tragically, that group will soon increase.

In April, a war widow will get £14·65 a week for her second and subsequent children, but only £13·65 for her first child because the extra £1 will be deducted. The treatment for war widows seems to be worse than that handed out to national insurance widows, because the children's allowance is not even uprated fully in line with prices. For instance, in April 1990 it was raised from £12·60 to £13·40. That is a 6·5 per cent. increase, although prices rose by 7·6 per cent. There was a similar shortfall in each of the previous two years, and there will be another shortfall this year. Even when child benefit is frozen, the war widows children's allowance is not fully uprated. I genuinely do not know the reason for that, and I should be grateful if the Minister would explain why war widows are treated so shabbily compared with other widows.

If we compare the combined value of the children's allowance and child benefit in November 1979 and April 1990, we will note that it was £14, the equivalent of £29·05 at April 1990 prices, and in April 1990 it was £20·65, a real loss in value of £8·40 per child. That is for war widows. Why? In the past 10 years, the Government have cut by almost half the true value of the essential child support payments to parents who are widowed, elderly or seriously ill. On top of that, the Government now plan to rob 192,000 families of the value of the £1 increase for the first-born this year. They are cuts, and they are furtive, unjust and miserly.

12.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on securing this opportunity to debate child dependency additions and the way in which they are increased. I congratulate him also on the care with which he prepared and presented his case to the House.

I hope to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about whether we were cheating or being fraudulent. I deny both charges. I hope also to explain some of the consistency that underlies our policy in this matter. I noted carefully what the hon. Gentleman said and his criticism of our policies, but our approach to the issue has its origins as far back as Beveridge's 1946 plan for social security. In framing his proposals, Beveridge established certain principles of how financial provision was to be made for those with responsibility for the care of children. Those principles, which I shall describe in a moment, have underpinned policies in this matter for all Governments since the introduction of the post-war social security system.

Beveridge's plan included a general scheme of children's allowances which gave direct provision for the maintenance of dependent children through the payment of the allowances to those responsible for such children's care. However, the new family allowances had a drawback—they were not paid for the first child, only for the second and subsequent children. Initially, Beveridge saw that as a way of observing the principle of shared responsibility between the community and the individual for the support of children while an individual was working. However, it was recognised that the scheme presented a real problem for someone who was not in work but who was still responsible for the care of children. In devising the new scheme set up in 1948, it was decided to provide an allowance for the first child by making an addition—hence the subject of the debate—to the benefit payable during such an interruption from work as a result of unemployment or disability.

As the House will see, the principle of child additions was established when there was no universal payment from the state towards the care of all children. That principle was put into effect in 1948, when family allowances were joined by increases in benefit for children made under the newly established national insurance scheme. In 1951, the principle was established that the setting of the level of child dependency increases had to take into account the level at which family allowance was being paid. This also confirmed the extension of the principle of linkage between the two forms of payments.

The rates of increases of benefit continued to be set at different levels dependent on whether the child was the first or a subsequent child in the family. However, the higher rate of family allowance for the third and any subsequent child which came into effect in 1956 was reflected in the rates of child dependency increases and three different rates of increases payable with widow's benefit were introduced in 1964.

The interrelationship between family allowances and child dependency increases was thus founded on the general principle that a lower rate of child dependency

[Mr. Michael Jack]

increase was appropriate where a higher rate of family allowance was payable for a particular child. Implementation of this principle was continued in 1967, when the then Labour Government introduced a third rate of family allowance for the fourth and any subsequent child, which resulted in a corresponding reduction by the same amount in the payable rate of child dependency increases for those children. This process was continued from 1968 onwards, when child dependency increases took into account the full amount of family allowance.

This position was reinforced in 1975 when the Child Benefit Act made provision for any increase in benefits for children to be adjusted to reflect any increase in child benefit. In the interests of consistency and accuracy I can do no better than quote the words of Baroness Castle, who was Secretary of State when the Child Benefit Bill received its Second Reading. In opening the debate, she explained that the relevant clause in the Bill

"continues the long-standing practice whereby dependency benefits paid, for instance, with sickness, unemployment and invalidity benefit are set at a rate which takes account of family allowance, so that together the payments provide a uniform level of income for each child."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1975; Vol. 892, c. 339.]

This establishes beyond doubt that the Government have followed the broad principles of the history and approach as outlined and confirmed in legislation by Baroness Castle.

When child benefit of £1 was introduced for the first child in April 1977, the dependency increase for that child was reduced by the same amount. The interrelationship that I have just established was further underlined in April 1978, when the rates of child benefit of £1 for the first child and £1·50 for subsequent children were increased and equalised at £2·30 for each child. The effect on child dependency increases was a corresponding reduction of £1·30 in the amount payable for the first child and a reduction of 80p in the increase payable for other children. The result was equalisation of dependency increase rates for each child. When the rate of child benefit was increased by £1 in April 1979, the rates of child dependency increases were reduced by the same amount.

In the course of reviewing the rates of benefits now, the Secretary of State is required to look at the rate of child dependency increases and also guardian's allowance, and child's special allowance which are benefits payable in respect of children and at the same rate as child dependency increases. He is also required to consider the rate of child benefit, and if he decides that an increase in child benefit is appropriate, he is empowered to make a corresponding reduction in child dependency increases and child-related benefits. I emphasise that this formula is the same as that used by the Labour Government in 1977.

To apply this measure means calculating what the child dependency increase would be if the general uprating percentage were applied and then deducting from that amount any cash increase in child benefit. The Secretary of State is thereby enabled, when setting these rates, to reflect by the operation of the formula the combined effect of the uprating increase and any reduction that he considers appropriate.

The use of the formula has protected beneficiaries who have had the full percentage rise in their child dependency increase in the years that have seen no increase in child benefit. Equally, this formula achieves the common intention shared for all those responsible for the social security system since 1948, that increases of benefit paid to those supporting dependent children had to take account of payments made for these children either by family allowances or, now, child benefit. The formula makes it possible to adjust the constituent parts of overall child support.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the history of this benefit. It is true that a different formula was used before 1977 and for the reviews of rates of benefit that took place in the Novembers of 1978 and 1979. This variation involved applying the percentage increase to the sum of the child dependency increase and child benefit and then deducting the new rate of child benefit from the total. This level of expenditure could not be sustained in the light of the economic situation that the Government inherited in 1979, and consequently we had to revert to the less generous formula of 1977.

The continued development of the social security system to help other disadvantaged groups was also in our minds. We have given assistance to such groups as disabled people, lone parents and war widows. Consequently this has constrained our ability to amend policy in this sector. In the context of competing demands on public expenditure, we decided in 1979 to uprate child dependency increases from 1980 by the lower amount allowed by the legislation and therefore adopted the formula first used in 1977, thus maintaining a consistent approach. Decisions in this area continue inevitably to be affected by financial limitations, and our view remains that increases of child-related benefits based on the 1977 formula secure the most effective use of finite resources.

The operation of the formula has been simple up to now. As the legislation now provides, as the hon. Gentleman said, for a single rate for benefits applicable to children, it has been a simple matter to increase this rate by the general uprating percentage and then to take off the actual amount of any increase in child benefit.

However, the fact that the main legislation is framed in terms of a single rate of child dependency increase raises a problem in observing the principle embodied in the uprating formula. The new proposal to pay a £1 per week increase in child benefit for the only, elder or eldest child in a family from April this year has the effect of creating two different rates of child benefit. Application of the uprating formula taking account of child benefit to determine the new rates of increases and benefits for children would necessitate the creation of two different rates for these benefits.

But I should mention that we are not proposing to break entirely new ground by making this provision—this answers a point made by the hon. Gentleman. Within the overlapping benefits regulations in this area of benefits for children are powers that enable us to cater for this contingency. The regulations provide for an overlapping benefit reduction in the amount of benefit payable for a child where the increase in child benefit for a single parent is also in payment. Adjustment in these circumstances is designed to prevent simultaneous payment of benefits meeting the same income maintenance needs of, in this instance, the same child.

As I have explained, the overlapping benefits adjustment that we are proposing to introduce is designed to secure exactly the same result as would have been achieved by the operation of the child dependency increase

uprating formula. We consider that the proposal will secure a fair level of support for each child and will achieve its aim of recognising the natural interdependence between payments available in respect of children. This aim is based on the long-established view about the way in which the social security scheme should help with the support of children, a view with which we see no reason to differ.

I remind the House that, for those in receipt of the child dependency increases who have more than one child—the hon. Member was selective in the use of his facts on this—the full value of the uprating will be applied to the child dependency increases applicable to the second and subsequent children, bringing the amount payable in their case to £17·95 per child.

The hon. Member also chastised us on the question of war widows. I point out that, in the interests of consistency all Governments, following the same pattern, have treated war widows in the child increases they get in precisely the same way. The rates that war widows receive are at a much increased and preferential level compared with those who also receive these increases. So that principle remains, but the levels are more generous. It is also worth pointing out that, for those on widow's pension, the social security benefit may not be the sole source of income. We have to have regard to the whole question of family income. The amount of widow's benefit payable is the same regardless of earnings, and I have noted with interest that 55 per cent. of all widows under the age of 60 are presently in employment. Equally, the group may also receive assistance through other social security benefits such as housing benefit or community charge benefit.

On the subject of war widows, I should add that the uprating order for this is being looked at. The hon. Member mentioned a number of detailed points which will take some close analysis. I do not want to avoid the Department responding, and I undertake to write to the hon. Member on those specific issues.

The hon. Member mentioned that those on invalidity benefits are the largest group receiving child dependency increases. I add that they, too, can have their incomes supplemented. To give the House an example, from April the average rate of invalidity benefit for a couple with two children will be £110·90. They will also receive £15·50 by way of child benefit. The beneficiary's spouse will be able to earn up to £41·40 net of work-related expenses before the rate of benefit is affected. In this example it would bring the family's total net income up to £167·80.

I should add that any occupational pension which the beneficiary may receive does not affect the payability of invalidity benefit. I hope I have shown that there is a wider view on this issue. Rightly, the hon. Member took a narrow point on a technical issue, but I have sought to widen it and I hope that he will accept the spirit in which that information is offered.

Having explained the principle and practice of the Government's policies towards child dependency increases, I must conclude by putting the debate in the context of the Government's overall approach to helping families with children. Here I believe we can take some pride from reflecting on the fact that this expenditure has risen by 30 per cent. in real terms since the last year of Labour Government and stands at £10 billion. In addition, this has helped us to finance new benefits such as family credit and income support, which has enabled us more accurately to target help to low-income families who also have children.

I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) for supporting me in this my first Adjournment debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 22 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Gulf Crisis

1. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many merchant ships the Government have requisitioned for the purposes of transportation during the present Gulf crisis.

5. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total strength of United Kingdom service men currently stationed in the middle east; and what forces have been sent by the Community member states.

6. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about developments in the Gulf.

9. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the deployment of British forces in the Gulf.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): We have now deployed to the Gulf the 1st Armoured Division, Royal Air Force Tornado, Jaguar and other aircraft, four destroyers and frigates, mine counter-measures ships and Royal Fleet Auxiliary support vessels. That totals some 35,000 service personnel. Deployment of those forces has involved the chartering of more than 100 vessels but not the requisitioning of any merchant shipping.

In addition to the substantial United States forces and those of Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt, many European countries are involved. France has committed naval, land and air forces. Italy has committed naval and air forces. Belgium, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and Spain have sent navel vessels and Portugal is providing naval transport for the United Kingdom.

Since the conflict commenced, the Royal Air Force has carried out more than 400 operational sorties as part of the allied campaign to liberate Kuwait. I regret to inform the House that a further Tornado aircraft based in Saudi Arabia was reported missing this morning, and the families of the crew have been notified. Four Tornado aircraft have been lost in enemy action since the campaign began. The air campaign is continuing today. As a further illustration of the level of co-operation between the allies, I am pleased to announce that a party of New Zealand defence force medical personnel will be attached to British forces in the Gulf. That contribution is to be greatly welcomed.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the whole House will echo my regret that the crew of a Tornado have been reported missing. I am sure that hon. Members hope that they will be safe. Why is such a tiny proportion of chartered transport shipping registered under the British flag? If those men, wherever they be from, are brave enough to sail into a war zone in the Gulf, they should be able to enjoy the conditions of work offered by registration under the British flag. It is a disgrace that they are not. If they are prepared to die for this country, they should enjoy the albeit too few benefits that go with the job.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman may know that the president of the General Council of British Shipping has made that point. British shipping is not unwilling to be involved but is simply busily engaged on other contracts. It has been possible to requisition ships to meet our needs without asking British companies to break their other contracts. This has been a successful deployment, in which a significant number of ships have been involved. We are grateful for the co-operation of all those involved.

Mr. Hardy: As many in Europe oppose the Hussein regime in Iraq, deplore the aggression in Kuwait and voted for the removal of the aggressor from Kuwait, and given the disproportionate and significant contribution made by British service men in the Gulf, does not the Minister believe that it would now be appropriate for him and his colleagues to suggest to our European partners that they must reconsider their position, perhaps in response to their votes at the United Nations and the contribution that their nationals, as well as ours, made in building up the military capacity of Saddam Hussein?

Mr. King: I confirm that we have encouraged the maximum contribution from our European allies. I have attended two meetings of the Western European Union at which we emphasised that it was important in the present position that Europe be seen to make an effective contribution and to support not merely with its votes but in a real way the efforts that have been made by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and, pre-eminently, the United States. Europe should be present, too. In addition to the contributions of forces that I have described, we have been grateful for a significant number of contributions of hardware, vehicles and ammunition from some of our NATO allies.

Mrs. Currie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the appalling and inhumane treatment of our prisoners of war in Iraq demonstrates yet again exactly what sort of cruel and brutal dictator we are up against? Should not the message that goes from here to Saddam Hussein today be that his actions will make us not less but more determined to see him off? Can my right hon. Friend report any progress in making contact with our prisoners of war by the Red Cross or the Red Crescent or one of the other voluntary humanitarian organisations?

Mr. King: I very much agree with the comments of my hon. Friend. As I advised the House last night, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross were here yesterday. As they requested, they were given access to the Iraqis in detention. They then intended to return to Geneva and seek to make immediate contact with Baghdad. I have not yet had a report today on what success they have had. I advise the House—it endorses what my hon. Friend said—that I was speaking this

morning to General Sir Peter de la Billière, our commander in the middle east, who this afternoon was to receive the first visitors from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They are the advance party for the medical facilities that we are preparing in order to honour our obligations under the Geneva convention to make sure that any Iraqi prisoners of war receive proper medical treatment if they need it. I confirm that the representatives of the ICRC have visited Saudi Arabia and inspected the arrangements that we propose to make for any prisoners of war we take. The committee said that it was very satisfied and impressed with the arrangements that we are making. That further underlines the fact that we are absolutely entitled to expect that treatment for our prisoners of war too.

Mr. Trotter: I refer my right hon. Friend to the case of Flight Lieutenant Adrian Nichol, whose parents come from my constituency. Our thoughts are with the families of all those who are prisoners at this time. The bravery shown by Adrian and his colleagues is matched by the bravery shown by his parents. Their relief that he survived being shot down has been replaced by their anxiety about his treatment as a prisoner. Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that there can be no qualification whatever of the obligation to apply the Geneva convention? Is he aware that the Iraqi ambassador said to me this morning that there was a way of not applying the convention? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that is not true and that Iraq must apply the convention?

Mr. King: That is absolutely right. I know that my hon. Friend has taken the closest interest in the case on behalf of his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Nichol, and that he has seen the Iraqi ambassador. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. He is absolutely right to say that Iraq is a party to the Geneva convention and it cannot pick and choose which bits of the convention it applies. We demand without qualification that, just as we shall extend to any Iraqi prisoners of war the rights to which they are entitled under the convention, because we are a party to it, those rights must be extended to our prisoners of war. I hope that the message has got through to Baghdad that, far from being helpful in the remotest way to the Iraqi cause or undermining the allied resolve, showing the films has only added to the determination of the population of Italy, the United States and Britain to back up our forces at this dangerous time.

Mr. O'Neill: I echo the Secretary of State's sentiments on that point. The House is united in our detestation of the manner in which our prisoners have been treated. I also put on record our respect for the bravery of all the men, including those who got back, and our appreciation of the work of those who have enabled them to get into the air and to make sorties at the fantastic rate that they have achieved.

Will the Secretary of State give the House an assessment of what the cost of deploying our troops has been? We have had a number of figures—some gross, some net. What success has he had in securing support from other countries, in particular Germany, which by treaty is incapable of participating in the exercise, and from Japan, which, by dint of its wealth and its interest in oil, has more than a right to make contributions, not only to the United States but to the support of our forces?

Mr. King: The hon. Member knows these subjects very well and is right to emphasise the difference between the gross and net costs. We are certainly seeking the maximum contributions from those who, for one reason or another, have not felt able to make military contributions to the allied effort, to ensure that they at least make the maximum financial contribution. We have already received in different ways such contributions from Japan and Germany and we shall see how we can maximise those. We have had host nation support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As for the overall figure, we have already had authority in the House for a further £450 million. I have told the House that we think that there is a daily cost of £3·6 million. I am examining those figures. I shall write in greater detail to the hon. Member and place that letter in the Library of the House.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said about standing together on such matters. There is a need for us, as a country, to stand together. I regretted having to inform the House about the loss of a further Tornado. I told the House that the families had been advised that the air crew are missing. Where we can, we propose to adopt a policy of releasing the names of the air crew as soon as possible, but only with the family's consent. In the latest case, we have not yet had the agreement of the families involved; although I know that the media will be most concerned to have access to the names, it is precisely because of the families' fear of harassment from the media that they are nervous about allowing the names to go forward. Therefore, I stress, as I did last night, that we should stand together as a country at a dangerous time. I am sure that the media will understand the point that I am making.

2. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of members of the armed forces in the Gulf are women; and what duties they undertake.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): More than 800 service women are serving with their units in the Gulf. They perform a range of duties.

Mr. Burns: In paying tribute both to the men and to the women of our armed forces in the Gulf, may I ask my hon. Friend whether, if a land war developed, there would be any conceivable circumstances in which women serving officers in the armed forces would be fighting in the front line?

Mr. Hamilton: There are no women employed in combat units in the ground forces, but there might well be women employed further back from the front line; they would have weapons for their own self defence and expect to use them.

Mr. Corbett: Is the Minister aware of comp[illegible]ints by women as well as men serving in the Gulf about the great delays in receiving post from the United Kingdom? One of my constituents tells me that post offices accept parcels for delivery only at first-class rates. Will the Minister undertake to look at that problem?

Mr. Hamilton: We have already considered the question of parcels and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if parcels are sent by the inland rate they will reach the Gulf in about 10 days. There are a number of post offices where staff still do not seem to understand the position and thus talk in terms of charging people an air mail rate,

which can be high if there are many goods in the parcel. We are concentrating hard on the letter post and doing all that we can to maintain a swift service.

Dame Peggy Fenner: Following complaints by the Kent Gulf Forces Support Group, we have been in touch with the Post Office, whose representatives have assured us that they are issuing instructions to all counter staff today so that they give the right help to the wives of our service men. Will the Department ensure that, whether it is a departmental or Post Office matter, the "blueys"—the special forms that can be sent forces mail—are available because, unfortunately, supplies ran out a day or so ago? I know that my right hon. Friend will accept that the families have enough anxiety without little things like this to niggle them.

Mr. Hamilton: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for her advice in relation to the instruction given by the Post Office. Several hon. Members have remarked to me that post offices have run out of blueys and the matter is being investigated. I suspect that the difficulty arises from maldistribution, as about 6 million were issued to the Post Office. We suspect that there may be quite large quantities at some offices, but none at others.

British Force Reductions (Germany)

3. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about reductions in British forces in Germany.

Mr. King: As I said in the House last night, we are continuing to study with our allies the proposals for change in the structure and deployment of our armed forces—proposals that have emerged from the work on "Options for Change".

We intend to proceed with the implementation of rationalisation proposals and other support changes in areas that do not affect our efforts in the Gulf. We shall make further announcements about our proposals in due course.

Mr. Redmond: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. Does he agree that, in the light of Government statements that it is the British nuclear deterrent which has maintained the peace in Europe, it would make economic sense to bring the British forces home, in view of the escalating cost of keeping them in the Gulf?

Mr. King: I am not sure that I entirely follow the logic of the hon. Gentleman's question. Our defence policy is well balanced, as set out in our proposals in "Options for Change". Of course, there is a very grave situation in the Gulf and the very uncertain developments in the Soviet Union may also pose problems, but I believe that the approach that we have adopted is the right one to ensure that, whatever changes are made, a strong defence capability for this country will be ensured at a time of great uncertainty in the world.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: My right hon. Friend's answer concerning the work done under "Options for Change" will be widely welcomed on both sides of the House. We recall that in announcing the exercise he warned us that the situation in Europe, as well as that in the middle east, should be taken fully into account. Can he reassure the House today that work on "Options for Change" will not be resumed until the lessons of the Gulf have been fully absorbed?

Mr. King: On that matter I can give a partial assurance. Certainly, I am very concerned to see that in areas where our capability in the Gulf could be affected, in the sense of a need to ensure the provision of adequate resources, the situation is not affected by our work. My hon. Friend will understand, however, that there are other areas involving the infrastructure of the services. There would be absolutely no point, for instance, in keeping redundant airfields. There are also other activities that need to be addressed. I am thinking, for instance, of the scale of some of our infrastructure in Germany. We have to make sure that we can sustain what is, without question, a very expensive commitment in playing our full part in the liberation of Kuwait. To that end, we must ensure that we do not waste money in areas in which expenditure simply cannot be justified.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Secretary of State agree that the aspiration of all parties in the House to reduce expenditure on defence needs to be tempered with realism, especially at this time? Would not it be irresponsible to make long-term judgments about force levels before the operations in the Gulf had been completed and the current uncertainties in the Soviet Union had reached a stage at which a considered judgment might be made as to the consequences? Does he agree that this is a moment at which a very considerable degree of caution is to be found in the steps being taken within the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. King: We have approached this whole exercise with a very considerable degree of caution. When I made my statement on 25 July I said, in relation to developments in the Warsaw pact—which many people might have felt at that time were moving in an entirely hopeful direction—that, while it was clear that there were opportunities, there were also risks in Europe and, elsewhere, some worrying trends with regard to the proliferation of missiles. I think that now, with the impact of Scud missiles in the Gulf, people understand why I warned about the risks of the unexpected and about the need to ensure the maintenance of an adequate defence capability.

There are major lessons to be learnt from the Gulf situation, particularly about the strength of the Army units and the amount of reinforcements that may be necessary to ensure that they have the required fighting capability. We are having to draw on reserves as well. I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that we shall learn those lessons.

Low Flying

4. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the amount and safety of low-flying activity over Northumberland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): My Department's aim is to distribute military low flying over the widest practicable area of the United Kingdom, including Northumberland. The amount is, however, kept to the minimum necessary to meet our requirements and all aspects of flight safety are kept under continuous review.

Mr. Amos: As one who has always accepted the necessity for low-flying activity, but who has made representations about it on behalf of constituents, may I ask my hon. Friend to pass on to the RAF the whole-hearted support of the people of Northumberland for the skill, courage and professionalism shown by RAF pilots? One of the prisoners of war comes from the north-east, so will my hon. Friend confirm that, unless Iraq strictly adheres to the Geneva convention in all circumstances and at all times, Saddam Hussein will be tried as a war criminal and executed with no ifs and buts?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who has always argued for his constituents. Low flying can be a nuisance, but it is the key to success in many of our operations in the Gulf. Had they not practised this difficult skill, our men and planes would be at greater risk. I join my hon. Friend in his tribute to the courage and dedication of the RAF, whose feats merit our admiration. On my hon. Friend's last point, I can confirm that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the sternest warning that those who violate the Geneva convention will be held responsible.

Mr. Beith: Now that the operational value of low flying has been clearly demonstrated, and the skills involved so courageously used, does the Minister share my hope that other areas of the country will be keen to share the burden of low-flying training that Northumberland now carries?

Mr. Carlisle: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we aim to spread low flying as wide as possible, so that there is as little disturbance as possible. I know that the House has immense admiration for the feats of the RAF in the Gulf and the skills that the pilots need have been learnt over many hours of practice over the hon. Gentleman's constituency and those of other hon. Members representing such areas. We are grateful for the tolerance of the public, who I believe now understand why that training is so vital. Those skills are essential if we are to press home attacks in the face of fierce opposition.

Mr. John Greenway: Low-flying Tornados over Northumberland on training exercises quickly arrive over North Yorkshire and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) said, they have been the cause of some nuisance and inconvenience. Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware, however, that the people of North Yorkshire salute the courage and bravery of our air crews and their valiant efforts in the past few days in the Gulf, and are convinced that everything that the Ministry of Defence has said about the tactical value of low flying has been proved and vindicated?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I repeat that we are grateful to the public for their tolerance of low-flying practice. As I said, the skills involved are crucial in the Gulf war and we should remember that lesson in the future.

HMS Warspite

7. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reason for his decision to decommission HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend announced to the House last year, we envisage a future submarine force of about 16 boats, around three quarters of which will be nuclear powered. As there were 17 nuclear submarines in the fleet on 25 July, a number of older boats, including HMS Warspite, are being decommissioned.

Mr. McCartney: Have not the Government have already wasted £100 million in a refit for this submarine, despite the fact that they knew in their private reports of the likelihood of the need to decommission because of problems with its reactor? Will the Minister advise the House what will be the cost of decommissioning Warspite, and are there any other submarines of a similar type which in the next few years will have to be decommissioned because of problems with their nuclear reactors?

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot comment on the material state of nuclear submarines. However, I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that we are decommissioning the oldest submarines that we have, which seems to be a very sensible thing to do in terms of taking out those that are least capable.

Dame Janet Fookes: While there may be a case for decommissioning this particular nuclear submarine, may I invite my hon. Friend to reconsider the wisdom of reducing the nuclear submarine fleet in the light of the uncertainties in the world at present and the fleet's undoubted flexibility?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, I fully accept what my hon. Friend says about the flexibility of nuclear submarines. However, under "Options for Change" we have given serious consideration to the United Kingdom's requirements in the light of changed circumstances in Europe. In this context we believe that 12 nuclear submarines is about the right number.

Reservists

8. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the call-up of reservists and his policy on conscription.

11. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he can give details of the Royal Air Force reservists who have been invited to enlist for the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: Some 1,200 reservists are already making an important contribution to Operation Granby and I have been impressed by the excellent way in which they have responded. The largest category are Army medical reservists needed for hospitals in the United Kingdom and the Gulf; an aeromedical evacuation squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, has specialist skills in moving injured by air. Members of No. 4624 movements squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, were called out recently to help with the huge logistical task. We will shortly be calling out about 450 members of the Royal Fleet Reserve who have expressed a willingness to serve. We have no plans whatsoever to introduce conscription.

Mr. Cohen: Were not we told that this war would be over in days rather than weeks and then weeks rather than months? Now the Prime Minister says that we are not to expect a quick victory. Were not we told of the success of the high-tech war machine, only for the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to tell us that the Scud launchers were plywood? Similarly, after a Somme-in-the-sand land

battle, will not we be introducing conscription whatever the Minister says today? This Government cannot offer our boys a job, but they can arrange their deaths.

Mr. King: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, since I have already answered it precisely, is no, Sir.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who thus far have been requested to serve have been delighted to do so? Is he also aware that other members of both these organisations would quite gladly give up their time for this service? This is the result of their having been volunteers in every sense, but there are occasions when some employers may not understand their enthusiasm. I hope that the Minister and his Department will handle this matter so as to make it easy for these volunteer attitudes not to give offence to employers.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I did have worries as to how easy it would be to recruit volunteer reserves and for the reservists to go. I have been deeply impressed by the tremendous willingness of those concerned. I have given the figures to the House. We now have 1,200 reservists coming out of their previous occupations and giving their help in critical areas where it is needed. It has been most impressive and encouraging support to receive.

Mr. Allen: Will the Secretary of State make it clear to the reservists who are about to be called up, to the public and to Parliament whether the reservists will be engaged in what is technically an armed conflict or whether Britain will declare war officially? Will he assure the House that before war is officially declared, Parliament will be able to ratify and endorse that decision?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. We are talking about medical personnel—the aeromedical evacuation squadron, which will accompany casualties back to Cyprus and Britain and which will certainly not be involved in conflict, and the movements squadron, which will be involved in helping to ensure that supplies move smoothly through British airfields and along the logistic chain to the Gulf, which will also clearly not be involved in conflict.

Mr. Allen: In view of the inadequacy of that answer, I give notice that I shall seek to raise the question on the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I regret that the hon. Gentleman cannot do that because he did not ask the original question.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our reservists and forces serving in the Gulf will be heartened by the almost unanimous vote in the House last night? Does he further agree that it is sad that it could not be a unanimous vote as 34 Opposition Members could not find it in their hearts to vote in support of our forces? Is it not interesting that they are exactly the same people who will not pay their community charge, and is it not a fact that they do not respect international law—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is miles wide of the main question.

Mr. King: Those who were unable to support the motion and the amendment last night must speak for themselves. I am concerned about what my hon. Friend says and I would simply say that when I spoke to General de la Billière this morning and assured him of the tremendous vote of the majority of the House in support of the task that we have asked him and the forces under him to undertake, he said that that would be the most enormous encouragement to them in the challenging time that they face. I express my appreciation to all those who voted in that majority.

Mr. Reid: Does the Secretary of State accept that the uncertainty faced by the reservists and, perhaps more importantly, by their families and the families of those deployed in the Gulf must give us cause for consideration? Does he accept that a key element of the morale of reservists and troops already deployed is the security of knowing that their families here in Britain are well and sensitively cared for by the rest of the community and by the Government? Will he acknowledge the tribute that we have paid to those families and the magnificent role that is played in caring for them by the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association? Finally, what do the Government intend to do and what have they already done to assist the SSAFA in caring for those service families? Will he join me in urging members of the public to do everything possible to assist the SSAFA in the important and magnificent role that it is playing?

Mr. King: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the points that he has made in his supplementary question. I join him in paying a warm tribute to the SSAFA. I repeat what I said yesterday about the setting up of the Gulf trust. That will go through to the service benevolent funds and will indirectly help the SSAFA to help the organisations to do the best that they can for the families involved. I also join the hon. Gentleman in expressing our greatest admiration for the families of all those in the Gulf. Our thoughts are with them.

EH101 Helicopters

10. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will confirm his order for 25 utility EH101 helicopters.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Decisions on support helicopters have been delayed by the need to take into account the implications of changes in Europe. I hope that the position will be clearer in some months' time.

Mr. Colvin: Is not it a pity that the Government cannot re-endorse the order for 25 support helicopters and authorise Westland to proceed with phase 2 of the project definition? I do not believe that "Options for Change" should be used as an excuse for further delay, particularly as experience in the Gulf and in Northern Ireland shows that our support helicopter force is seriously extended. In the Gulf in particular it has had to call upon the Royal Navy to help it out.

Mr. Clark: I note that my hon. Friend has played a very conspicuous and distinguished part in advocating the choice of this aircraft. However, he very well knows that project definition work is examining in detail the Royal Air

Force's foreseen requirements and it has to do so against a whole range of options and to establish more firmly the costs and the risks involved. The analysis of these findings is taking longer than was expected.

Gulf Crisis

12. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the performance of Vickers plc in supporting the British forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes. Vickers has made considerable effort to support the British forces in the Gulf both in providing spare parts and modification kits. It has sent a team of its own technical advisers to the theatre. Both my Department and the forces on the spot are very satisfied with its performance.

Mr. Batiste: Is not it a fact that one of the lessons that can be learnt from what my right hon. Friend has just said is that there is and will remain a continuing need for a strong and flexible United Kingdom defence industry that is capable of supporting United Kingdom forces wherever in the world they may be deployed?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right. Certainly, the support that we have received from Vickers is of the greatest importance and has impressed not only our forces but those of our allies.

Mr. Boyes: Is the Minister aware that recently I visited Vickers in Newcastle and saw both the excellent Challenger tank and the repair and recovery vehicles? I also saw on video the successful operations in the desert. If, unfortunately, ground forces are to be used in major action the Challenger tank will ably support British forces. Will the Minister join me in sending a message of confidence to the management and skilled work force in Newcastle?

Mr. Clark: Yes, very gladly. I particularly welcome the hon. Member mentioning the armoured recovery vehicles which are being sent out to the Gulf as fast as possible. They are in full production at that factory. We have the heaviest and most powerful of all the armoured recovery vehicles available to the allied forces and these have been the subject of very favourable comment on all sides.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. Friend pay a particular tribute to those civilians who have remained in the Gulf to adapt and maintain the main battle tanks, particularly those who are associated with the engines that Vickers use, which are made in Shrewsbury and which make the British-made battle tank far superior to any alternative? They are doing a superb job and will not let our forces down.

Mr. Clark: Yes, indeed. Their specialist knowledge is invaluable and I echo my hon. Friend's tribute to their steadfastness in staying on in the Gulf.

Polaris

13. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current repair and maintenance programme of the Polaris fleet.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to publish details of nuclear submarine refit, repair or maintenance programmes.

Mr. Douglas: Is the Minister therefore quite sanguine about the press reports relating to the technological failures in the reactors of the Polaris PWR? Will he comment on the vexatious problems that we are having at Rosyth in relation to the disposal of nuclear waste? Will he take it from me that it is quite unacceptable that Rosyth should be the sole base for the disposal of nuclear waste and that the Plymouth and Devonport waste should be redistributed to Scotland? Will he comment on these observations?

Mr. Hamilton: We do not comment on the material state of our nuclear submarines. However, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of operating any of our submarines unless we are convinced that they can be operated safely. The issue of the nuclear waste sites has still to be decided and in the meantime we are quite happy with the provision that has been made for the disposal of waste from nuclear submarines.

Mr. Franks: May I take the opportunity provided by the hon. Member's question to remind the Minister that the Polaris fleet was designed and built in Barrow? If there is to be a change of policy and location for the repair and maintenance of that fleet will he bear in mind the ability and skills that are readily available in Barrow?

Mr. Hamilton: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House that Barrow is very interested in the future refitting of nuclear submarines.

Submarines

14. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning improvements to the technology available to Royal Navy submarines to enable them to identify fishing vessels and their nets in the vicinity of their operations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A large number of firms have submitted proposals for pinger devices that will make fishing nets more easily detectable to dived submarines. Trials carried out with such a device last month were a success, and a further series of trials will take place in the near future.

Mr. Wigley: In view of the tragic accident off the Scottish coast not so long ago, and following a series of accidents in the Irish sea involving Welsh fishing vessels, will the Minister ensure that all the resources necessary will be provided to ensure that such devices are made available as soon as possible, to avoid any further loss of life?

Mr. Hamilton: I give that undertaking and assure the hon. Gentleman that a competitive evaluation of a range of commercially produced devices will take place early this year.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q.1. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we can all share an understanding of the appalling strain to which the families of service men and women serving in the Gulf are subject at this time? I refer in particular to the family of Flight-Lieutenant Peters in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). We have all seen the outrageous photograph of Flight-Lieutenant Peters, which has been used so cruelly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made reference to the inspirational courage of the men doing the fighting. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the steadfast courage of their families at home, who have to wait for the warriors to return, is also deserving of all our support?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, whose views will be shared throughout the House. The families of those serving in our forces, and most especially of those who have been captured, are suffering a special agony at this time. We send them all our sympathy and we appreciate the courage that they, too, are showing.

Mr. Kinnock: I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks. Does he agree that the relatives of airmen missing in the Gulf conflict have enough to put up with without having to contend with a prying press? Does he share my view that uninvited intrusions into the lives of very anxious people cannot serve any public interest whatsoever? Will he take this opportunity to appeal to editors to desist from any invasions of privacy?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. It is standard practice not to disclose the names of those killed without the consent of their families, and I hope and expect that convention to be observed throughout the conflict. I share the right hon. Gentleman's view that people are entitled to privacy at a time of grief and I hope that their privacy will be respected by everyone.

Q2. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those industrial nations that are not committing forces to the Gulf can assist by making increased financial contributions to those bearing the expense of upholding the United Nations rule of authority?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Some of the countries concerned have constitutional restrictions against committing forces and some are already contributing substantial funds. However, as the costs mount, I hope that we may look to them to contribute further to the communal costs.

Q3. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Trimble: Is the Prime Minister aware that many of us admire the way in which he and his Government have handled the middle east crisis? In particular, we like the vigour of the Government's response, their clarity of purpose and their refusal to allow themselves to chase after the mirages of diplomatic and political initiatives. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that we see a sad contrast in the Government's response to Irish republican terrorism, which claimed yet another innocent victim in Ulster yesterday? The Government have allowed themselves to be mired down in political action that has inhibited the response that should be made. Will the right hon. Gentleman bring to Ulster the same clarity and vigour with which he has pursued the Gulf crisis?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his initial remarks. We have the same opposition to terrorism in northern Ireland as we have to terrorism in the Gulf, and we shall continue to keep that view firmly in mind.

Mr. Moate: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while our attention is rightly focused upon the allied forces in the Gulf today, it would also be right at this time to pay tribute to the late King Olav of Norway who, in times of war and peace, did so much to cement the strong links of friendship between Norway and the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. King Olav was enormously popular in this country and there is a real affection in the hearts of many people here who came to know him. I am sure that the House would wish to join me in sending our sincere condolences to Her Majesty the Queen on the death of her cousin, and on the death of a very good friend to this country.

Homelessness

Q4. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what meetings he plans to have with representatives of the homeless in London.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so at present. Ministers at the Department of the Environment regularly meet voluntary agencies that deal with the problem of homelessness. The most recent such meeting was on 17 January.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Prime Minister aware that tonight more than 3,000 people will be sleeping on the streets of London, that 20,000 families are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London and that last year there was an 11 per cent. increase in the number of people declared homeless in the capital city? In the midst of this homelessness crisis in London, will the Prime Minister make resources available for local authorities to build and to buy homes for rent, rather than creating bed-and-breakfast millionaires and paying money to companies for leasing properties? Does the Prime Minister agree that growing up in overcrowded bed-and-breakfast accommodation, or in shared housing, casts a blight over children's whole lives and that they should be allowed to grow up in the same decency that we would want for ourselves?

The Prime Minister: I wish to see people, and most especially children, properly housed. There is no dispute between the hon. Gentleman and me on that matter. Perhaps the first and the most helpful thing that can be done is for a large number of London authorities, including Islington, to bring into use the large number of empty properties that they own. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a few weeks ago my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced a substantial increase in resources to deal with the problem of homelessness in London.

Mr. Tracey: Further to what my right hon. Friend has just said, could he also look into the millions of pounds in uncollected rents which Labour councils in London are failing to collect? That money could also be channelled to help the homeless in a most constructive way.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly fair point.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barnes: Does the Prime Minister accept that a concern for the well-being of British troops and a concern for the well-being of Iraqi citizens are not incompatible and in fact reinforce each other? Will he tell us the number of casualties in Basra, in southern Iraq, which is a prime target because of its docks, railway marshalling yards and other facilities, including massed Iraqi troops?

The Prime Minister: There are no means by which I could know those figures, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He also knows, for it has been repeatedly stated from this Dispatch Box in the past few days, that allied pilots—all of them—have a firm instruction to attempt to avoid civilian casualties wherever possible.

Sir George Gardiner: In view of Saddam Hussein's despicable treatment of prisoners of war, on top of other crimes against humanity, does my right hon. Friend agree that the destruction of Saddam Hussein is now a legitimate war aim?

The Prime Minister: I strongly suspect that Saddam Hussein may yet become a target for his own people. It is perfectly clear that this man is amoral: he takes hostages, attacks population centres and threatens prisoners. He is a man without pity and, whatever his fate may be, I for one will not weep for him.

Q6. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official enagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Illsley: In view of yesterday's newspaper reports that Department of Health press officers are likely to mislead the country seriously about the ability of the national health service to cope with the Gulf war casualties, will the Prime Minister assure the House that accurate information will be given to ensure that truth does not become one of the first casualties of the war?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may certainly have that assurance. There is no question of the national health service or any of its spokesmen, in the Department of Health or elsewhere, misleading either the House or the public.

Q7. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Viggers: After much talk of political union in Europe, is not it disappointing that our European allies, given a clear chance of political unity over United Nations resolutions and their imposition, have failed to match their actions to their rhetoric?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point. There is undoubtedly a considerable disparity in the extent to which individual European countries have committed themselves to the problems of the Gulf. Political union and a common foreign and security policy in Europe would have to go beyond statements and extend to actions. Clearly Europe is not ready for that and we should not be too ambitious when it comes to the intergovernmental conference on political union.

Sir David Steel: Does the Prime Minister agree that, if this morning's reports that Saddam Hussein has started to destroy oil installations in Kuwait are correct, that may suggest two possibilities—first, that Saddam Hussein has given up any chance of holding on to Kuwait and, secondly, that his claim to be defending the interests of Palestinians is manifest nonsense, as 150,000 of them are still trapped in Kuwait, their livelihoods wrecked by his pillage of that country?

The Prime Minister: Saddam Hussein's claim on the latter point is nonsense in any event, whatever may be happening to the oilfields. I am, of course, aware of the media reports of damage to the oilfields and I have made a number of inquiries up to and including the last few minutes to find out the present position. As yet, I have no independent evidence to confirm those reports; I assure the House that, if and when such evidence becomes available later in the day, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make it public.

Mr. Rathbone: Much has been made of the way in which the Iraqi authorities have broken the Geneva conventions. Will my right hon. Friend now assure the House categorically that British forces, British authority and our allies will stand by both the spirit and the letter of the conventions?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that absolute and complete assurance. It is, I think, an assurance that no one anywhere in the world, even in Iraq, would doubt.

Mr. Rowlands: Given the almost unanimous feeling about the prying press, will the Prime Minister go a little further and make a personal approach to all the major national editors to ensure that they respect people's feelings and wishes?

The Prime Minister: I certainly hope that everyone, including the national editors, will respect the privacy of

people in grief. I hope that that will satisfy the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that those remarks will have been heard.

Q8. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sumberg: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when he visited the Gulf recently, he met troops from the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, formerly the Lancashire Fusiliers? That regiment has a strong link with my constituency and recruits extensively in Greater Manchester. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to send a message of thanks and appreciation not just to the troops themselves, but to their families, who anxiously wait at home for news?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do that. I enjoyed my meeting with them in the desert very much and was able to bring them up to date with Manchester United's results which, in many cases, were in the forefront of their minds.

Q9. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fields: Although it is difficult to contemplate the future while we are seeing the horrendous scenes from the Gulf today, while the Prime Minister is contemplating winning the peace will he consider the final arbiters of stability in the Gulf are the Iraqi and Kuwaiti masses? If he accepts that long perspective, how does he think these people will have reacted to the news that tens of thousands of people have been killed, something which seems to contradict the briefing that we have been given that only economic and military targets have been affected?

The Prime Minister: I repeat that I have no confirmation of the figures of casualties that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. He will know from the debates here in the past few days the important issues of principle at stake. I think that those issues of principle are understood both in the House and across the whole world.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning recent events in Latvia? Does he share my belief that it would be very sad if the Soviet Union were to lurch back into repression? Will he assure the Soviet Union that economic aid from the European Community will depend on the maintenance of civil rights throughout the Soviet Union and its satellite states?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. I can also tell him that at present we are in regular contact with the elected Baltic leaders. I hope to see the Latvian Foreign Minister, Mr. Jurkans, tomorrow. I understood earlier today that President Gorbunovs of Latvia has had a meeting with President Gorbachev and that he stated at the conclusion of the meeting that he does not expect direct rule to be imposed. I very much hope that that proves to be correct.

Scotland

Q10. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will next be visiting Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I had a very enjoyable visit to Scotland recently and I look forward to returning there shortly.

Mr. McAllion: The Prime Minister is for ever telling us that he is prepared to listen. If he did so on his recent visit to Scotland, he will know by now that the people of Scotland want the poll tax abolished, they want a Scottish Parliament established in Edinburgh and they want the Tories kicked out of office at Westminster. When will he call a general election to allow them to achieve these three things?

The Prime Minister: How very curious. That is not precisely what they said to me.

Oilfields (Kuwait)

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: In view of the answer that the Prime Minister has just given covering the application under Standing Order No. 20 of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), does he wish to proceed?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before 9 o'clock, Mr. Speaker, I gave you notice that I wished to raise under Standing Order No. 20, the subject of

"the detonation and ignition by Iraq of the oilfields in Kuwait."

In answer to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the Prime Minister said that he would make information public. May I put it to the Prime Minister——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The application is to me. The hon. Member is asking for an emergency debate on this matter.

Mr. Dalyell: The matter is definite, urgent and important. Under "definite" I ask that we just see the visual images, that are like Flixborough or Piper Alpha, of the fires in the Kuwaiti oilfields. The truthful answer is that we do not yet know the causes. It depends on oxygen, on the amounts of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, and on the problems of photochemical smog, but I argue that this an important matter and that it ought to take precedence over the business later tonight or tomorrow.

What is at issue is the injury to the planet: the soot could make agriculture, both animal husbandry and crop-growing, impossible and could effect the lives of millions of people if, as has been argued on the best scientific grounds, the monsoons were to be altered by this sort of fire.

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, with the good will that the Prime Minister showed in his answer and with his undertaking, that there would be constant reporting of events in the Gulf, and that, through the usual channels, you give precedence, either later tonight or tomorrow, to the ecological and human results of these disastrous fires. Unless there is a ceasefire, who will put them out?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the detonation and ignition by Iraq of oilfields in Kuwait."

I have no doubt that, if what the hon. Member has outlined were to occur, that would be a very serious matter. I have listened carefully to what he has said about it today. I have to say that, in this case, the matter which he has raised does not meet the criteria of Standing Order No. 20, and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not know whether you have yet received any representations on your new regulation that hon. Members must wear passes when they are in the House. No one, I am sure, would wish to quibble with any regulation which you might deem necessary for the duration of the emergency, but a number of us have considerable reservations about this as a long-term security measure and believe that it might even be counter-productive. May I, therefore, express the hope that there is no unexpressed intention that the new regulation should be perpetuated after the emergency, and that, if there were such an intention, we would have a full opportunity to debate the matter?

Mr. Speaker: The wearing of passes in the precincts has been introduced, on advice, in connection with the current situation. Any decision to continue the practice indefinitely would be a matter for further consideration.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Home Secretary of a desire to come to the House to make a statement concerning a substantial number of people of Iraqi and Palestinian background, who have been taken into custody under immigration regulations in the past few days, despite the fact that the Home Secretary gave an undertaking last week that internment would not be introduced? This is an important matter, and I hope that the Home Secretary will come to the House to report on it.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such intimation. What the hon. Member said will have been heard by the Patronage Secretary on the Front Bench.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you waive formalities to ensure that a delegation from the Iraqi National Assembly may visit this place? It wants to send members here to meet us. *[Interruption.]* Even in this period, when we are at war, it makes sense if we speak about peace and about negotiation rather than confrontation. It makes sense to the people outside and to the people that I represent; perhaps it does not make sense on the Government Benches. Clearly something has to be done, hopefully, to resolve the horrible conflict. The National Assembly of Iraq has a political and moral right to send members here to speak to us. *[Interruption.]* I am willing to listen to them, even if that lot are not.

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid that that is not one of my many responsibilities. I have no power to waive any formalities in that regard.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you noticed from the Order Paper that one and a half hours are permitted for the discussion of motion No. 3, a highly complex matter, and also for motion No. 4, which is equally complex? Can you clarify for the House whether the effect will be that, if we do not complete the discussion of motion No. 3 and its amendments in one and a half hours, there will be no discussion of motion No. 4?

Mr. Speaker: What I can say to the hon. Member relates to points of order. The quicker we get to the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill and complete it—exceptionally, there is not a great demand to take part in that debate—the quicker we can get on to the motions which the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. It will last one and a half hours, or until 11.30 pm if we get to that business before 10 o'clock.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With reference to the letter which you sent to each of us yesterday—the contents of which I agree with and which I thought were eminently sensible—are you satisfied with the security arrangements concerning the well-being of the staff of the House of Commons, as well as the more vocal Members?

Mr. Speaker: "Satisfied", I think, would be a large claim to make, but I hope that we have taken adequate measures which will ensure the safety of not only the staff but hon. Members.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The staff of the Admission Order Office, the Serjeant at Arms and his staff and the Chair are very helpful in enabling those constituents who have travelled far and have waited nine hours, to witness this House live from the side galleries. While we fully understand why those galleries have had to be closed as a result of the demonstration, is that not seen as a way of giving in to the sort of harpies who do that sort of thing?

Those of us who represent innocent visitors, such as the Shropshire Women's Institute, who do not go around throwing paint on hon. Members even if they are peace seekers, think that it is a great sadness that we are giving in to those who behave like that, while the right sort of visitors, who pay their taxes that we may sit here, are banned from watching us because of the restriction on the number of seats. Can this policy be a very brief one indeed?

Mr. Speaker: I hope the whole House will agree that it is right that we should take what measures seem necessary in order to protect hon. Members in the Chamber. The incident the other day could have been much more serious.

BILL PRESENTED

Public Service Contract

Mr. David Porter, supported by Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. Paul Marlow, Mr. David Martin, Mr. James Cran and Mr. Alan Amos, presented a Bill to establish a public service contract, with compensation for failure to supply, between community charge and ratepayers and local authorities, and between consumers and public services: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 61.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 6) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 20) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Wales) Order 1991, (S.I. 1991, No. 5) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Road Traffic (Random Breath Testing)

3.41 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Road Traffic Act 1972 to provide for additional powers for the police to carry out random breath tests at the road side.

My purpose this afternoon is to highlight the need for further action aimed at deterring the drinking driver, to draw attention to the need for additional police powers to breath-test drivers and to present the case for random breath testing within the prescribed context of a roadside checkpoint.

Public demand for action to reduce drinking and driving has never been greater. A survey by the Harris research centre last March revealed that drinking and driving was among the three offences which people rated as deserving priority attention by the police. That concern is borne out by the facts. Drink-drive deaths are more frequent than deaths arising from violent crime. Around 10 per cent. of all accidents are caused by drinking and driving. The most recent figures show that over 22,000 casualties result from alcohol-related accidents each year, and half of these will not have been drinking drivers but the innocent victims of the selfishness of drinking drivers. At an economic cost to the community of over £600 million, the cost is great. The human cost is impossible to calculate.

As we become increasingly aware of these grim facts and the terrible and unnecessary waste of life, of youth and of childhood our duty to identify and vigorously implement effective counter-measures becomes that much more pressing. While publicity programmes and appropriate penalties have a part to play, there is agreement worldwide that increasing driver perception of the risk of being caught is the real key to any successful programme aimed at reducing alcohol-related accidents.

The most recent figures show that around 500,000 breath tests are conducted each year. Surveys have shown that the chances of detection are quite low, ranging from one in 250 trips in some areas to one in 4,000 trips in others. Drivers' perception of the chances of being caught is also low. A recent study by the Government's transport and road research laboratory showed that 42 per cent. of people who admitted to drinking and driving believed that their chances of being stopped if over the limit were very small. Drivers will only believe the chances of being caught are high if they have evidence that those chances are high. That means being tested themselves, seeing others being tested, or hearing reports from friends or contacts that they have been tested recently. In any event, it means high-profile breath testing activity.

Caution must be exercised in interpreting the mixed results of the Christmas campaign, but it is clear that the police effort is visibly shifting from detection to deterrent. There must be a balance between the two. There is more awareness among the police that the function of the breath test is not merely to detect but to deter drinking and driving. That means more breath tests, fewer positive breath tests and more negative breath tests.

Many people believe that the current debate is not about the principle of carrying out more breath tests or stopping at random but about the best method of conducting more breath tests to achieve a reduction in road accidents. It is about the best methods of policing the best deterrent effect.

There is widespread opinion that the best way of achieving that is a highly visible police presence at roadside checkpoints, selecting a series of vehicles at random and carrying out breath tests on those passing through. Countries that have introduced that procedure believe that it has been most effective. In New South Wales, Australia, it has brought about a reduction of 35 per cent. in alcohol-related deaths and serious injuries, with cost savings to the health service of 20 times the cost of implementation. It is therefore a cost-effective method.

The police recognise the deterrent effect of those procedures. Mr. Peter Joslin, who is chairman of the traffic committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said in a recent address to a road safety conference:

"The New South Wales experience had demonstrated that a deterrent based enforcement system was far more effective in reducing drink drive fatalities than was the traditional enforcement model."

Some argue that, more or less, that can be achieved under the present legislation, but it is clear that existing law is not well designed for deterrence. The current powers on random stopping and breath testing, following reasonable cause or suspicion, are more suitable to apprehension than deterrent. If used for high-profile breath testing at a roadside checkpoint, the procedure is a poor man's random breath testing.

Having first stopped a driver at random, the police officer must make up his mind, within the first minute of contact with the driver, whether he can justify requesting a breath test. Immediately there is potential for conflict between the police officer and the driver. That may contribute to a driver's suspicion, however misplaced, that he is being treated differently from the next man. It is a clumsy procedure and, although one or two police forces have proceeded valiantly with that approach, it is questionable whether all police officers would feel confident or comfortable using it widely. If we are to ask the police to do more, let us not ask them to use what many perceive to be a sideways approach.

The Bill does not go as far as providing unfettered discretion for the police to breath-test at any time, anywhere or in any place. It will provide for additional police power to conduct random breath tests at well signposted roadside checkpoints that have been authorised by a senior police officer. That will provide the element of deterrence, which is difficult to achieve under current procedures, and will allow the police to bring about a significant reduction in accidents. I cannot think of a better use of police time. Removal of police discretion will also remove the potential for conflict and ensure that even the most experienced drinker cannot rely on his driving performance to escape detection.

It necessarily follows, therefore, that random screening impinges numerically more on the innocent rather than on the guilty, but as the purpose of screening is to deter the guilty from committing the offence, it functions to safeguard the interests of the innocent majority. The principle is practised everywhere—in security checks in this House and baggage checks at airports. The need for random breath testing is well understood by the public and has received consistently high support. They appreciate that there will be a minor inconvenience.

In the past three years, six surveys of public opinion have resulted in more than 70 per cent. support for the introduction of random breath testing in Britain. Only last November, a poll carried out by NOP for the transport and road research laboratory and a further poll carried out by the Consumers Association, which was published in December, indicated 77 per cent. support. Some 3,000 out of 3,400 responses to the latest Government consultation on breath-testing powers argued for additional powers.

The list of organisations in support of random breath testing is long and impressive. It includes the Association of Police Surgeons, Action on Drinking and Driving, Alcohol Concern, the British Medical Association, the Consumers Association, the County Road Safety Officers Association, the Guild of Experienced Motorists, the National Council for Civil Liberties, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety—of which I am a member—and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Like the amendments to the Road Traffic Bill which will be discussed soon, my Bill will put deterrent policing on a proper footing. In so doing, it will allow a significant contribution to be made to reducing road accidents and casualties.

3.50 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Member seek to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir. I seek to oppose the Bill. I hope that, having heard my speech, the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) will not push the matter to a Division.

First, we all agree that we are dealing with a serious problem. Every year, 800 to 900 people die because a driver or motor cycle rider drives above the legal limit. That is a serious issue. I shall not draw a comparison with the present conflict in the Gulf, because the position is different there. Deaths on the road caused by alcohol are wholly unnecessary. There is agreement across the House on that issue.

The second question to be addressed is whether countries can learn from each other. The answer is that clearly each can. What happens in New South Wales matters. What happens in Sweden matters. I shall argue that what happens in Britain matters too. My third point is that the test is what works best in this country.

We should re-emphasise what a ghastlly business drink-related crashes are. Only when people understand how terrible such crashes are can they realise that what matters is not necessarily what is popular but what will work and will continue to work. By tradition, I quote the words of Auberon Waugh in *The Spectator* of 15 February 1986, in an article which affected me when I took over responsibility for a time for cutting road casualties. He wrote:

> "Every day people lose husbands, wives, parents, children and friends they have loved, whose loss reduces every perspective to dullness, misery and pain. In many cases they carry the pain around with them for the rest of their lives. At moments like this one realises that under the surface of polite society there is a great well of sadness and bereavement, an aspect of the human condition which is as inescapable as it is seldom remarked, yet looming larger in many people's lives than any of the things they pretend to think important."

That was written after the death of his sister. He continued:

> "The only excuse for allowing my own howl of anguish to be heard is to give those as yet unbereaved a glimpse into the hellish blackness lying under the surface".

Those words help to emphasise that we must consider whether the procedure offered by the hon. Gentleman is likely to be more effective than the present procedure.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in considering the comparison with New South Wales and the figures that he presented. It is an occasional habit in this country to say that, if something is invented here, it cannot be as good as what we can learn from research overseas. There is a British tradition of saying, "What shall we do?" and then asking, "I wonder whether it will achieve anything?" Instead, people should focus on what we want to achieve and how to do so.

In New South Wales, the proportion of dead drivers above the legal limit in the year before the introduction of random breath testing was 40 per cent. Within two years, with the help of the most enormous publicity campaign and intensive general policing, the figure was reduced from 40 per cent. to 33 per cent. That was a significant and welcome improvement.

The comparative figures for Great Britain from 1982 to 1984—the same years—show that we reduced our proportion of dead drivers above the legal limit from 33 per cent. to 26 per cent.

We have achieved a reduction by the same number of percentage points with no change in the law, no change in sentencing and no change in enforcement. I could argue that changes in the law or in enforcement could make a difference, but the figures show that what was claimed for New South Wales in the years bridging the introduction of random breath testing, happened here anyway.

We want a strategy that continues to reduce the avoidable deaths and anguish caused by drink driving. The figures tend not to be quoted. The figures in New South Wales show that, in 1984, 33 per cent. of dead drivers had alcohol levels above the legal limit, while in 1989, 33 per cent. of the drivers were above the legal limit.

In Great Britain, the figures for the last year are provisional, the others are not. In 1984, 26 per cent. of our dead drivers were above the legal limit. The figure is now down to 19 per cent. We have had the same degree of improvement since 1984 as New South Wales had when it brought in random breath testing up to 1984.

I cannot use a range of statistics in this debate, because it is too short. Any objective observer commenting on what has worked most effectively would agree that we have seen the greatest improvement here whereas, sadly, in New South Wales, a lower plateau was reached in 1984 and the figure has not changed significantly since then.

The country often quoted when discussing drink driving and random breath testing is Sweden, where 40 per cent. of those caught above the legal limit have no licence. In this country, that figure is 20 per cent. Therefore, the level of habitual drink drivers—those who continue to drink and drive even after they have been disqualified—is running at twice the level in Sweden that it is here. That, together with other evidence—*[Interruption.]* There is no point in Opposition Members shaking their heads: those are the facts from Sweden.

[Mr. Bottomley]

The figures show that, if we want to find a strategy that reduces drink-driving among those who are most likely to do so heavily, we may do best to continue and increase what we are doing, rather than switch to a different system.

In the past seven years in this country, we have reduced heavy drink-driving by as much as we have reduced the lighter, but still objectionable, drink-driving. Our approach has been working all the way across the board, from the alcoholic, the habitual reoffender who is caught, to those who might be called the sick and social, who are still part of the problem.

I make two recommendations to the House. First, if we were ever to introduce random breath testing, we should not do it in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis)—by telling chief police officers precisely how to do part of their job——

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The law is confused, and chief constables want to know what they can do.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) says that the police are confused, which shows why we should have a bigger debate rather than simply piling in about what appears to be fashionable.

At present, the police are not using their existing powers consistently across the country. In Merseyside, half the drivers stopped and tested are above the legal limit—clearly, there is not enough testing in Merseyside. We can make the same argument for parts of London. Police chiefs should decide that, unless it is impossible, drivers involved in traffic crashes—they are not accidents, but crashes—especially where injuries are involved, should have their breath or blood alcohol concentrations tested. That would detect and deter more people.

The argument against random breath testing is that it produces only one in four of the people who are caught in New South Wales or Sweden—three out of four are caught in targeted testing. Before people get carried away with the fashion, they should look at the figures, because the reduction in deaths matters more than anything else.

Some people can explain what it is like to receive a phone call in the middle of the night, rush to the hospital not knowing whether loved ones are still alive. They know what it is like to explain a death to younger siblings and children left behind, and what it is like to raise children, nurture them with love and care, and have them taken away before they have lived a full life. Such suffering demands that we do not go for fashion or partial research, but continue what we have been doing in this country—reduce our drink-driving rate to a lower level than in any other country where research has been done.

I ask the House to resist the ten-Minute Bill and join in continuing to tackle this immensely serious problem in ways that will continue to be effective.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 165, Noes 49.

Division No. 42] **[3.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Adley, Robert
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amos, Alan
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Lawrence, Ivan
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Pawsey, James
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark

Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian McCartney and
Mr. George J. Buckley.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Ashton, Joe
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Crowther, Stan
Dickens, Geoffrey
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Grylls, Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hunter, Andrew
Janman, Tim
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Sir David
Nelson, Anthony
Patchett, Terry
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Steen, Anthony
Summerson, Hugo
Waller, Gary
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wilkinson, John

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Colin Shepherd and
Mr. Peter Thurnham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Allen McKay, Mr. Stephen Day, Sir Hugh Rossi, Mr. Roland Boyes, Mr. Bob Cryer, Mr. Michael Martin, Mr. Ronnie Fearn, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. David Bellotti and Mr. Terry Lewis.

Road Traffic (Random Breath Testing)

Mr. Terry Lewis accordingly presented a Bill to provide for additional powers for the police to carry out random breath tests at the roadside; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 62.]

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have just come from Her Majesty's prison, Pentonville, where a constituent of mine is one of about 70 Iraqis held in conditions far worse than those in which Saddam Hussein held his hostages. He has lived in this country for nearly 10 years. He was picked up without any notice and brought to the prison in handcuffs. He is a respectable business man, who has never been involved in any political activity of any kind. He and about 70 other people are now languishing in Pentonville prison awaiting deportation to Iraq, where many of them face perhaps death.

As I cannot get any sense out of the Home Office on this subject, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether you could use your influence with the Secretary of State for the Home Department to ask him to come to the House to make a statement. Perhaps you could remind him that we are supposed to be fighting a police state, not behaving as though we are one.

Mr. Speaker: This patently is not a matter for me. The hon. Member has made his point, and I am sure that what he has said will have been heard by those on the Front Bench.

Orders of the Day

Export and Investment Guarantees Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.12 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill has two main purposes. The first is to update the legislation that enables the Government to provide, through the Export Credits Guarantee Department, export credit and investment insurance. The second purpose is to bring about the privatisation of the insurance services business of the ECGD.

Before I describe how the Bill achieves these two purposes, I should like to explain the background to this legislation. For over 70 years the ECGD has been protecting United Kingdom exporters against the financial risks of selling abroad. During that time, it has supported over £250 billion of British exports. It has operated as a separate Government department reporting to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It has insured the whole spectrum of exports, from raw materials sold on cash terms to process plant for which the financial risk in some cases can spread over decades. The ECGD's operations naturally break down into two separate businesses. These have two quite distinct characteristics, which are reflected in ECGD's organisation and management.

The insurance services group, which is based in Cardiff, handles exports sold on short-term credit. The project group, which is in London, handles capital goods exports sold on medium and long credit terms. Those groups are increasingly run as separate businesses, although their financial results are combined in the publication trading accounts of the ECGD.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can I ask the Minister what may be a difficult question for him to answer on that second group of capital goods? I understand there are reports today that British construction companies were involved in the design and, in some cases, the construction of underground reinforced concrete aircraft hangars in parts of northern Iraq. I do not know whether that information was made available to Her Majesty's Government or whether those contracts had ECGD cover. Were those projects covered by export credit guarantees? In so far as I understand that the Treasury is required to approve such arrangements where they are made, was the Treasury involved, and did the Minister of Defence make any representations to the Department of Trade and Industry in so far as it also has a role?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman referred to contracts, but his remarks were vague. He did not specify any particular contract. I suspect that he will be aware that the Government, and indeed all previous Governments, have sound commercial and political reasons for not revealing details of individual transactions with individual exporters. That would be a breach of commercial confidence. If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise specific matters with me, perhaps he will write to me.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Details have been transmitted——

Mr. Sainsbury: I am sorry, but I must get on.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may not have got the answer that he wanted, but it is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister has asked me to provide information which is already in the public domain. It has been transmitted on British television today to the homes of millions of people. The individual plants have been named and journalists have had discussions with people in the Departments concerned, and that information should be dealt with in Westminster.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order. The hon. Gentleman can make such points if he catches my eye later.

Mr. Sainsbury: In August 1988 my noble Friend Lord Young, then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, agreed to a review of the ECGD. That review was to identify whether any changes were needed to enable the ECGD to serve better the needs of United Kingdom exporters, particularly after 1992 and the completion of the single market. My noble Friend was particularly concerned to establish whether the existing structure of the ECGD, which has served exporters so well over many years, would remain appropriate in the future, especially after the completion of the single market.

For the insurance services group, the major change is the increasing concentration of its business on exports within the EC and the growing competition between European insurers for that sector of the business. Those trends are certain to continue. There is also the threat to the insurance services group of a possible legal challenge to its EC and OECD business on the basis of its being a state aid incompatible with articles 92 and 93 of the treaty of Rome.

For project business, the pressures are altogether different. There the trading environment has been dramatically changed by the world debt crisis and its aftermath. That has put the ECGD's trading accounts into substantial deficit and it has reduced significantly the level of new business opportunities in comparison with the early 1980s. For those opportunities that arise in the less risky markets, competition between British and foreign exporters is fiercer than ever.

It was against that background that a review was published which has subsequently been known as the Kemp review. It concluded that the interests of British exporters were not best served by leaving the ECGD unchanged. Its principal recommendations were that the insurance services business should be separated from ECGD and converted into a Government-owned company with a view to eventual privatisation. The review also concluded that the remainder of ECGD's activities should continue to be provided by Government through the ECGD, which would remain a separate Government department.

Furthermore, the review recommended that a reinsurance link should exist between the private insurance services company and the ECGD. This would allow the new company to place certain risks with the ECGD which could not be reinsured on the private market.

The House will also recall that, at the same time as Ministers were considering the review, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry conducted a short inquiry into the future of the ECGD. The Select Committee invited evidence from a wide range of outside bodies—exporters, trade associations, bankers and brokers. The vast majority of the memoranda submitted to the Committee supported the recommendations in the review and the need for ECGD to continue as a Government Department to support capital goods exports sold on long and medium-term export credit was particularly stressed. It was also accepted that the ECGD needed to be restructured if it were to compete in the single market. A large majority of the memoranda submitted to the Select Committee supported the privatisation of the insurance services business.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Will the Minister tell us how many people supported the idea of immediate privatisation without waiting for the four to five-year period recommended by Mr. Kemp?

Mr. Sainsbury: At that time, immediate privatisation was not being considered. It was not an issue that was put to those who were submitting memoranda to the Select Committee.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): I am sure that the House will welcome this privatisation. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House about the effect of privatisation on the needs of the small and medium businesses, 70 per cent. of which do not export? Many of these companies could export if they had a more flexible form of credit insurance. Will he assure the House that one of the results will be greater flexibility to help those firms to enter the export market in the national interest?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We would like to see even more smaller businesses engaging in exporting. In practice, it is the smaller exporters who probably find the greatest advantage in having one organisation able to provide insurance on their sales, not only to the export but also to the domestic market. I shall come to this point again later.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Since I was a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, could I inform the House that Rolls-Royce in particular told us that the faster we got moving the better?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am very grateful for that information from my hon. Friend, who is a member of the Committee.

I return to my theme of setting the scene for the provisions of the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who was then the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, announced on 18 December 1989 that the Government broadly accepted the Kemp review recommendations. It was decided to introduce legislation that changed the status of insurance services in Government-owned companies. Private capital would then be injected into the company as soon as practicable. In accordance with normal insurance practice, my right hon. Friend noted that the company would need to secure reinsurance in the

private market, but accepted the possible need for the Government itself to make available reinsurance for certain risks for a transitional period of up to three years.

The Government believe that this change in the status of the insurance services group is essential, but we stress that the recommendation for change came from the review and it has the strong endorsement of exporters. The insurance services group is based in Cardiff and has nine regional offices throughout the United Kingdom. The group handles a lot of repeat business. The great majority of the exports it covers are handled on cash or short-term credit of up to a maximum of 180 days.

Since the insurance services group moved to Cardiff in 1976, it has played an important role in expanding the financial services market in south Wales and has wisely used the wealth of talent in that area. There has been major investment in new technology, which last year resulted in more than 70 per cent. of the 180,000 applications for insurance cover received being processed within 24 hours of receipt. That compares with only 18 per cent. four years earlier. That improvement greatly helped the competitiveness of exporters of all sizes.

Buyer information is essential to good underwriting, and further improvements have been made in obtaining it, with ECGD taking the lead in initiating exchanges of information with other credit insurers. I am sure that no exporter who has had a policy with ECGD will have failed to notice the successful efforts that have been made to improve customer service. We now need to safeguard that service, so that it can compete in the post-1992 market, and hence the Bill. Without the changes for which it provides, the present service to exporters would be at risk.

Until recently, the insurance services group enjoyed a virtual monopoly.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I am fully aware that my hon. Friend wants to privatise the insurance services group in Cardiff and to bring about competition. However, if the only bidder for the Cardiff-based group is Trade Indemnity, which is ECGD's competitor, does my hon. Friend not agree that it would be better to keep the group in state ownership, because competition between a state and a private insurer would be better than a privately owned monopoly in that sector?

Mr. Sainsbury: I will refer shortly to the process of sale and to the point that my hon. Friend raises.

The need to put the group into the private sector is not associated just with competition but with the change in the trading environment consequent upon the completion of the single market in 1992 and the threat of legal challenge to the group operating as a Government aid, in breach of the treaty of Rome.

The Government have insisted that the insurance services group should be run as a business and not as a subsidy for exporters. In any event, a subsidised service would be in breach of the treaty of Rome. Competition is welcome, but it is essential, if the business is to flourish, that the group does not find itself competing with one hand tied behind its back. The creation of a single market means that exporters and their insurers more and more regard the Community as an enlarged domestic market, and the distinction between domestic and export credit insurance is becoming blurred.

Many private insurers are offering, and companies are taking, credit insurance policies covering both domestic and export trade, which is both administratively convenient and cost-effective, particularly for smaller businesses. If Cardiff is unable to offer a competitive product, it risks losing its best business.

The insurance services group is prevented by statute from offering a truly competitive product. The Government would naturally not want to legislate to widen the Secretary of State's powers to enable him, via the ECGD, to operate domestic credit insurance in competition with existing private sector insurers. If the group is to compete effectively in the market, it must be as a private sector insurance operation.

Those compelling reasons for moving the Cardiff-based company into the private sector are reinforced by the legal threat to which I referred, which hangs over all European state-owned export credit insurance agencies. The financial backing that a national agency such as the ECGD receives from its Government could be regarded under article 92 of the treaty of Rome as state aid, which is prohibited. Almost every EC member state is working on the assumption that state-financed insurance services may be prohibited. Therefore, like us, many find themselves reorganising their official export credit insurance structure to cut out state control. The United Kingdom must take account of that, and I suggest that the Opposition also take account of it.

The danger is that, if ECGD's insurance services are excluded from EC and OECD business by such a ruling, it would remove about 75 per cent. of better risk business at a stroke, and without such business, the insurance services group's remaining risk portfolio would not be viable. It would also be chaotic for businesses to seek export insurances from one organisation for exports to the EC and OECD and from another for exports to the remaining areas of the world. An outcome along those lines must be avoided—it is against the interests of the ECGD, its customers, staff and the taxpayer.

Clearly, the status of the insurance services group must be changed to meet those legal and business challenges, but also to meet the huge opportunities which await it. Not only is Insurance Services a market leader in the United Kingdom: it is well placed to build up business in other countries. It will only be able to do so after the proposed changes. Then it will be able to provide the cross-border services enshrined in the EC insurance directive, although ultimately that will be a matter for the owners of Insurance Services. The chance exists for the company to develop into a major force in the European Community, bringing substantial benefits to the United Kingdom and to the South Wales economy.

Before turning to the details of the Bill, I should like to mention two matters about which there have been some comments and misunderstanding. It has been said that the Government will not continue to provide insurance for those risks that the private insurance industry is unwilling to take. I am glad to be able to tell the House that that is not the case.

The Government intend to transfer as much of the risk as possible to the private sector. We are confident that the vast bulk of the risk will be insured, or reinsured, in the private insurance market immediately upon privatisation. However, there are a few countries in which ECGD facilities are currently available but where adequate private market capacity does not exist at present. To avoid a sudden and sharp reduction in the facilities available to British exporters in the immediate aftermath of

[Mr. Sainsbury]

privatisation, some support will be available from ECGD to enable the company to maintain facilities in those markets and those arrangements will be kept under close review.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is reassuring to know that facilities will continue to be available, because they will be much needed in some difficult areas. Can the Minister tell the House how long he envisages that they will remain available, as that question is in the forefront of the concerns of many companies?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I have said, we shall keep those arrangements under close review. As the hon. and learned Gentleman will appreciate, I am sure, the markets to which I refer change. A market may be acceptable to the private sector, but political events may change its marketability, and different arrangements need to be adhered to. That needs to be kept under review. It is a changing situation, and we shall keep it under review.

The second misunderstanding that I wish to clear up relates to project exports, which ECGD will continue to cover. In recent years, ECGD support for project exports has proved an expensive business for the taxpayer, largely due to the effects of the debt crisis, which has plunged ECGD's accounts into substantial deficit, after many years of operating at a healthy surplus. It will take many more years before we can say with certainty what the cost has been.

As an illustration, ECGD's last published accounts showed a cumulative deficit of £693 million and referred to the possible need to add £3 billion to that figure, to make further loss provisions on sovereign debt. Those are enormous amounts by any standards, and the annual cost of interest rate subsidies, incurred to allow exporters to quote the internationally agreed minimum interest rates, must be added to them, which costs about £400 million at present.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my hon. Friend be following the European Community rules from now on, and will the project group not provide any form of assistance to industry within the EEC? Does he agree that that would help to release assistance for projects in other parts of the world, where it is clearly more needed, especially third-world countries in, for instance, south and central America?

Mr. Sainsbury: As my hon. Friend may know, in practice the project group's business is almost entirely in the developing world. The European Community market —and, indeed, the market in OECD countries—is either not one that British exporters of project business have been successful in penetrating, or a cash market rather than one in which ECGD cover is called for.

Despite the cost to which I have referred, the Government remain committed to supporting this important sector of our industry. Nevertheless, it would be a dereliction of our duty to the taxpayer, and to the rest of the economy, not to take any action aimed at preventing a repeat of this experience in a few years' time. What was needed, therefore, was a decision-making framework that would better enable us to balance the national-interest case for supporting project exports with the financial risk to the taxpayer. The ECGD has been working on the so-called portfolio management system to meet that need.

I recognise that, while the ECGD has been doing that work, there has been some uncertainty about the cost and availability of future ECGD support; but the announcement made on 14 January by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has ended that uncertainty, and exporters have welcomed that announcement. It guarantees insurance cover for desirable project exports—those that we are reasonably confident will be paid for—but within a pricing and risk-control structure that protects the taxpayer's interest. I confirm the Government's commitment to provide a stable and viable framework of ECGD support for project exports.

Part I of the Bill relates to the powers that are being sought for the continuing ECGD. Its main purpose will continue, as its name implies, to be the provision of guarantees in support of British exports and overseas investment. The Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment Act 1978, which is the statutory basis for those functions, has begun to show its age, and that is especially marked in the way in which the Act prevents the ECGD from taking full advantage of the latest techniques and instruments available in the financial markets. That means that it cannot manage the assets and liabilities that it has acquired in the normal course of business as well as it would like. For example, the ECGD often wishes to adopt innovative financial techniques to help minimise loss or reduce costs, only to find its hands tied by out-of-date law.

Of course, those needs could not have been anticipated in 1978, so it is perhaps not surprising that the existing Act relies too much on the Secretary of State's inherent and implicit, rather than explicit, powers. That has on occasion given rise to uncertainty about the ECGD's authority, and has limited its field of activity.

For those reasons, part I adopts a completely fresh approach to describing the powers of the continuing ECGD. The existing Act is to be repealed, as parts I and III are a complete replacement for the old powers. Let me emphasise again, however, that that implies no fundamental change of any kind in the role of the ECGD. Its primary function will remain the encouragement of exports and overseas investment through the provision of insurance against credit risks. It will remain subject to the objective for its trading facilities to operate over time at no net cost to the Exchequer, and the new powers should enable it to do its job better.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): As my hon. Friend knows, the existing arrangements provide so-called section 2 cover. When the ECGD is up against its country limits and therefore will not insure a project, the matter can nevertheless be referred to the Export Guarantees Committee, where what is essentially a political decision will be made to provide cover—although the country is up to its limit, and repayment may be a more dubious prospect than it is in the case of other countries. Will that provision continue, or do the Government propose to deal with such cases in a more hard-nosed and commercial fashion?

Mr. Sainsbury: Broadly the same procedures will apply, but we believe that what is proposed and is now being introduced under the portfolio management system will

provide a more viable and practical framework to balance the mutual objectives of helping the exporter and having proper regard to the interests of the tax payer.

Clause 1 retains the existing but rarely used powers for rendering economic assistance overseas, powers which have lain dormant since the creation of the Overseas Development Administration, except for the restructuring of sovereign debt. There is no current intention to use the powers for any new purpose, and I repeat previous ministerial assurances that this would not be done without a prior statement to the House.

Clause 2 enables ECGD to continue to give guarantees on investments made in overseas enterprises. An additional power is introduced to extend cover in relation to associated companies, and this will broaden the scheme's appeal to potential investors. It is a minor example of the need for this legislation.

Clause 3 allows the ECGD to enter into whatever arrangements may seem appropriate for the proper financial management of its portfolio, and this will permit ECGD to benefit from greater use of financial market techniques such as bond issues, interest rate and currency swaps. This will better control and possibly reduce costs to public expenditure.

It will be noted that the statutory distinction between guarantees issued in the national interest and other "commercial" guarantees is not retained. It has become a less relevant distinction, and it will become even less relevant when ECGD's business is centred, after the insurance services changes, on medium—and long-term export credits. This has implications for the Export Guarantees Advisory Council, whose current role is to advise ECGD on the "commercial" risks——

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not wish to interrupt the Minister, but you will recall that, just a few moments ago, the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), on an intervention, asked some questions of the Minister. May I draw your attention to the Register of Members' Interests, published in January 1990, which among other entries records that the hon. Gentleman is parliamentary consultant to Trade Indemnity plc, which is likely to be the purchaser of ECGD if the privatisation goes ahead?

I do not wish to cast any aspersions at all on the hon. Gentleman, because he has in the past made his own position quite clear. I just wonder if it would not be more proper in these matters, even if Members are intervening rather than making speeches, for them to take every opportunity to declare a personal interest.

Will you not give the opportunity to the hon. Gentleman to put on the record the fact that he is a parliamentary consultant to Trade Indemnity?

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is outrageous of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). He knows perfectly well that I have the honour to be parliamentary consultant to Trade Indemnity. The hon. Gentleman also knows that I happen to be a practitioner in this matter. If those of us who are in the House are going to be unable to participate in debates in the House on matters which are of great concern to our constituents and throughout the country, it is unfair. I have been accused by the hon. Member. The point that I raised with my hon. Friend had nothing to do with whether I have a consultancy or not but everything to do with the measure that my hon. Friend is bringing before the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harrold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman is now getting dangerously near seeking to debate the whole question whether hon. Members should declare their interests or not when they intervene in debates.

There is an obligation, according to "Erskine May", that hon. Members participating in debate should declare their interest. However, it has not been the practice in recent years to require an hon. Member in the course of asking a question or intervening to make formal declaration of an interest which is recorded in the Register. It will be usual and expected that an hon. Member having a direct pecuniary interest in a matter before the House declares that interest in the event of making a speech in debate.

I very much hope that that will enable us to get on.

Mr. Ron Davies: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to make it clear that I did not make an attack on the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood. He appears to be sensitive about these matters, and I am sure that he is well rewarded for his sensitivity. I do not want to criticise him, because he has made it abundantly clear in the past that he has a direct financial involvement.

The point that I was trying to make was whether in these circumstances, where we are discussing the transfer of public assets to what is likely to be one private monopoly, and where the hon. Gentleman has such a close relationship, it would not be proper to interpret the ruling that you quite rightly gave in its broadest sense and require the hon. Gentleman and others who might have direct financial involvement to take the opportunity, even though on an intervention, to make that declaration of interest. Could you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps reconsider your ruling with a view to broadening its scope so as to require hon. Members in these circumstances to make that declaration of interest, even though they are only making an intervention?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would be most unwise of me to go beyond what I have said. I very much hope that right hon. and hon. Members will bear in mind what has been said in the course of this exchange.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Further to that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So that the House will not be misled, I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Caerphilly for his kindness and courtesy—what he is like when he attacks people, I do not know. I am most grateful for his felicitations. Just for the avoidance of doubt, I hope to be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—which is why I shall sit down very quickly now—later on in the debate. It is at that point that I had intended at some length to develop a full explanation to the House of my interest in these matters, which I hope might be for the benefit of the House rather than to its detriment.

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Member for Caerphilly may be interested to know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) had had the courtesy to tell me that he hoped to try to catch your eye during the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that he intended to declare his interest if he were called—

[Mr. Sainsbury]

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Caerphilly said that he did not want to interrupt the Minister. I do not know what he does when he wants to interrupt the Minister, because he has certainly succeeded in making a lengthy interruption.

Returning to the implications for the Export Guarantees Advisory Council, whose current role is to advise ECGD on the commercial risks underwritten under section I of the existing Act, the advisory council consists of eminent bankers and industrialists, and I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank the chairman, Mr. Peter Leslie, and the council members for all the time and valuable advice that they have freely given to ECGD. The major challenges facing ECGD mean that their expertise is needed more than ever; consequently, the Bill extends the advisory council's role so that ECGD can seek its guidance on any matters relating to ECGD's powers, duties and functions.

These changes in ECGD's basic powers do not, however, mean that there is to be any change in ECGD's practice, which stems from the statement by the noble Lord, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, then President of the Board of Trade, that it will not issue guarantees for "unduly hazardous or quite crazy" risks. In any circumstances where ECGD's accounting officer judges risks to fall into this category and is instructed by Ministers to cover them, then, as has been past practice, an announcement will be made to the House.

I should also stress that the change does not mean that the Government's commitment to project exports is in any way reduced.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Will my hon. Friend the Minister just consider what, at least in my submission, is an important component of the examination of any risk that the Government propose to subsidise at the taxpayer's expense—the profitability of the manufacture for the company concerned? Surely, in an examination of the likely return to the community as a whole, it is important not to put ourselves in the situation where the net effect of our subsidy is to hand over a substantial amount of British taxpayers' cash to some foreign country.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) raises an interesting point. The objective of ECGD is to try to determine whether the buyer will pay for what he is purchasing, whether it is a sovereign buyer or an individual company. It would be requiring rather a lot of ECGD or any other credit insurance agency to expect it to try to make judgments on the pricing structure of the vendor.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My hon. Friend said earlier that the intention was that these services should be provided at no cost over time. Does that imply that previous losses have to be recouped over a period?

Mr. Sainsbury: We would hope that what are now shown as losses would substantially be recovered over time, through rescheduling particularly. I am not suggesting that future business should acquire a profit sufficient to repay the losses which have been accumulated and which stand in the books, but we hope that in due course they will be recovered through those who have failed to pay meeting their payments later, usually through the Paris Club rescheduling.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Sainsbury: I should like to move on, as I have been generous in giving way, and we have had points of order as well.

Clause 5 will permit ECGD to encourage exports and at the same time improve its financial outturn by marketing some of the information and skills which it acquires in its business activities. Clause 6 places limits on the level of commitments which may be assumed in respect of the operations covered by clauses 1 to 3 of the Bill.

At present, the sterling statutory limit is set at £35 billion and no change is proposed. The foreign currency limit currently stands at 25 billion special drawing rights, but as commitments under this limit do not exceed 6 billion SDR at present, it is proposed to reduce this statutory limit to 15 billion.

Clause 7 provides for a return to be laid before Parliament giving details of the Department's sterling and foreign currency commitments as soon as practicable after 31 March in each year. ECGD also wishes to be in a position to take advantage of ecus as a financing medium and such other units of account as may be created from time to time, and provision for this has been included in clause 6, which I am sure will be welcome to hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Part II of the Bill relates to the proposed privatisation of the insurance services business. It provides the necessary legal framework to implement the Government's intentions. It will allow the Secretary of State to prepare a scheme for the transfer of any property, rights and liabilities currently vested in ECGD's insurance services business. This is dealt with in clause 8.

Clause 9 provides for the arrangements for the transfer of staff to the Government-owned company. These arrangements adopt the practice of earlier privatisations by ensuring that the terms and conditions of service of employees do not suffer as a result of their transfer. In this regard, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, commonly known as TUPE, will apply and will protect the position of staff.

While TUPE provides some basic but none the less important legal safeguards, it does not apply to all elements of the employment package which civil servants enjoy at present. First, TUPE does not apply to pension schemes. The Government nevertheless wish to ensure that the staff of insurance services who transfer to the private sector will enjoy pension arrangements in conjunction with terms and conditions of employment which are overall broadly comparable to the civil service terms and conditions which they currently enjoy.

Anything which failed to achieve this could prejudice the prospects for effecting a voluntary staff transfer. This would, in turn, endanger the success of the whole privatisation, given the vital importance to the business of the expertise and commitment of its staff. For that reason, in judging the bids they receive, the Government will ensure that any proposed employment package on offer reflects this need.

Secondly, there is a point about the arrangements for redundancy compensation for civil servants. These redundancy rights are currently enshrined in the civil

service pension scheme. As I have said, pension schemes are not transferred under TUPE. It will clearly be important that the transferring staff do not lose the rights which they have built up in the civil service. It is therefore intended that arrangements will be made which will ensure that the existing entitlements of these staff to redundancy compensation remain with them in their private sector employment.

Clause 10 provides the means for the Secretary of State to acquire or be issued with shares in a vehicle company for the purpose of converting it to a Government-owned company. So as to avoid unnecessary uncertainty, it is planned that the sale of the Government-owned company to the private sector will take place as soon as practicable after it has been set up. Clause 11 enables the Secretary of State to take reinsurance from the company into which the other assets and liabilities of the insurance services business have been transferred.

Clause 12 confers the power to delegate to the new company or any other body the functions described in clause 1. This is primarily intended to permit the new company to undertake an agency role on behalf of ECGD in respect of any business where ECGD remains the principal in the transaction, but wishes, for reasons of administrative convenience, to delegate the administration to the new company.

I should at this point like to say a few words about the proposed method of sale of the insurance services business to which reference has been made. The Government have already announced that this will be by means of a trade sale rather than a public flotation. This is because of the particular character of the insurance services business—a highly specialised, risk-taking enterprise which has yet to operate as a fully independent entity. A trade sale offers the best prospect of securing a purchaser who will understand, and be committed to, this complex business and bring to it strong financial resources. This is obviously the right solution for our exporters.

There is also every reason to believe that a competition between interested trade purchasers will achieve good value for money for the taxpayer. Responses to a pre-qualification questionnaire issued by the Government's financial advisers have been received from a wide range of institutions. As soon as convenient after Second Reading, and after taking account of the points made by hon. Members in the debate, a short list of bidders will be selected from the respondents to the questionnaire, and they will be invited to submit definitive bids.

However, while price will be an important factor, it will not be the only one. At the end of the day, the Secretary of State reserves the right to reject any bid which in his view is unsatisfactory, after taking all relevant factors into account. I will ensure that the names of the short-listed bidders are published and that other relevant information will be made available in the Library of the House. As hon. Members will be aware, the Kemp review itself and ECGD's annual report and accounts are also placed in the Library.

I am sure that the whole House will realise that the changes we are proposing add up to the most radical and comprehensive review of ECGD since its establishment over 70 years ago. In making these changes, the Government's sole aim has been to ensure that the vital services provided by ECGD to exporters are safeguarded for the future. It means that ECGD will now continue as two separate organisations.

However, ECGD has never shirked the need for change. I am confident that both organisations will continue to provide first-class support for our exporters. Insurance Services, as a company, will be able to provide a still better and even more up-to-date service to British industry than it could as part of a Government department. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that a first-class standard of export insurance continues to be available to British exporters. I commend it to the House.

4.56 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): We have become used to seeing the Government introduce privatisation measures amid confusion and incompetence. The latest measure is a striking example. We are presented with a Bill which seems to be privatisation for privatisation's sake. It is difficult to see any other justification for it. It is clear that what is proposed in the legislation will be harmful to British exports and to the economy as a whole.

The Bill has already given rise to a storm of protest by those affected. Even by the Government's standards, it seems singularly ill thought out. It is likely to be harmful not only to exporters who rely on the short-term cover provided by the insurance services group of ECGD, which the Government propose to privatise, but also to those who rely on the long-term cover provided by the project division. The Bill includes clauses dealing with both parts of ECGD and both, I believe, will be badly affected by it.

Mr. Hind: The hon. Lady has been making a point about the reasoning behind the Bill. Surely there is a fundamental reason why we should examine the problem. It is likely after 1992 that under article 92 state support will be ruled out by the Commission. Clearly it is state support contrary to the competition rules. If that is so, the British exporter will be at major disadvantage, facing a state-run support system which in effect will be illegal under Community law.

Ms. Quin: There are two responses to the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The first is that there is no immediate pressure from the European Commission to take action of the kind that the Government are proposing. The second—if the hon. Gentleman will do me the courtesy of listening—is that other state credit insurers within the EC do not seem to be acting in the same way as the Government in this respect. So there are clear differences. Because of that, we need to look at this much more closely rather than simply saying that, because 1992 is coming along, we automatically have to change the status of ECGD.

Mr. Salisbury: The hon. Lady seems to think that there is something wrong in the Government's taking action in good time. What would she say if we left it until the last moment and had to do things in a rush? Could I also draw her attention to the action being taken by the Danish Government in respect of its own export credit organisation? She should be aware that this is a real threat to which other European countries are having regard, and we would be falling short of our duty to exporters if we ignored it.

Ms. Quin: It is not really a question of taking action in good time; it is a question of taking action which will mean that the so-called playing field in Europe is very uneven indeed with regard to export support. We are worried by the fact that the Government are, in effect, cutting back on this kind of export service at at time when other European countries, including our major competitors in France and Germany, are not doing so. I shall return to the point about the level playing field later in my comments.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): We have heard the Minister, and we have heard the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) from the Conservative Back Bench, but that is not what Kemp found in his report. He said this:

"there is nothing in the existing package of 1992 legislation nor in any other proposals for legislation that have been tabled or are known to be under consideration, which in any way affects the ability of the state agencies to carry on business as they have been doing."

I think it is a red herring—or a blue herring—from the Conservative Benches.

Ms. Quin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Although the Kemp report dates from some time ago, the position as outlined by my hon. Friend remains substantially the same.

I stress that this measure comes at a time when support for exports in Britain is particularly important. We had a huge trade deficit in 1990—probably about £16 billion—following the staggering deficit of more than £19 billion in 1989. These are deficits of a magnitude previously unknown in our country. We run a huge deficit with West Germany and also with Japan, and we have the difficulty of competing with those countries in third-country markets. The average annual growth rate in the volume of our exports in the period 1979-89 was only 3·5 per cent. It was lower than that of any EEC country, Japan or the United States.

The need to export has never been greater than it is now. As one newspaper headline put it just a couple of weeks ago,

"As never before, it's export or die."

Yet the Government's response to the need to export more has been to cut the services available to our exporters. The Government have introduced charges for export services, there have been cuts in support for exporters exhibiting at trade fairs, for example, and there have also been failures to help exporters in particular cases. One case which recently came to my attention, and about which I have written to the Minister's colleagues, concerned the Government's role in helping to lose a valuable order for six ships from Appledore Shipbuilders, in Devon, because the Government refused to act as guarantor in the way that the customer had come to expect from other Governments.

The point should be made also that the current general economic climate in Britain is not helpful to exporters, so this is a particularly inappropriate time to introduce measures of this kind. Inflation is high, interest rates are very high, and the pound is at a difficult level for exporters within the exchange rate mechanism. Yet the Government's response is to privatise the ISG division of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. How many handicaps is industry expected to survive under in this country?

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Lady asks how many handicaps industry will have to suffer under. It would be a handicap if it had to suffer under the policies of Opposition Members. Has she not seen the figures for car exports? She has talked about exporters not succeeding, but the exporters of cars have succeeded very substantially.

Ms. Quin: I hope to refer to some of the contacts that I have had with exporters who are extremely worried about the Government's policy in cutting back on exports. They seem to me to have a great deal more in common with the industrial regeneration ideas of the Labour party than with the ideas of the present Government.

Mr. Norris *rose*—

Ms. Quin: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have already given way several times and there are quite a few arguments that I would like to make. Perhaps he will be able to intervene later on.

As the Minister pointed out, ECGD has a distinguished record as the world's most experienced export credit insurer and it has traded profitably for most of its 70 years' existence. Unfortunately—again, as has been pointed out—over the last decade it has been affected by the special circumstances of third-world debt, although in this respect it is no different from the credit insurers in most other countries. ECGD services are valued by large and small firms alike. Small firms in particular do a great deal of business with ECGD and are worried about changes that are being proposed. Even the large firms which are the prime beneficiaries from the project division none the less sub-contract in the course of their work to many smaller firms, which thus benefit indirectly from the support given.

It has been known for some time that the Government would be likely to propose changes in ECGD's status. The prospect of a genuine single market in Europe alters the picture—I certainly concede that—and it was felt that ECGD should have the flexibility to operate within the large single European market. This was one of the considerations behind the Kemp review and the different options suggested in that report for ECGD's future operation.

The Kemp report suggests a choice of three possible directions for ECGD. One was staying within Government, perhaps as a separate accountable unit. The second was to become a Government-controlled agency outside the civil service, and the third was to be a Government-owned company with the introduction of private capital probably after a four to five-year period. The reaction to the Kemp review at the time was generally favourable, although exporters were largely satisfied with ECGD services anyway and were not exactly clamouring for change.

What do the Government decide to do as a result of the Kemp review? Quite simply, they decide to ignore Kemp's recommendations entirely, take no notice of the wealth of advice they received at the time, and come out in favour of the immediate privatisation of the insurance services group. The transition period of four to five years becomes a transition period of 1·5 seconds, or however long it takes technically to create a Government-owned company and then immediately, in the same breath, complete the privatisation process.

The Kemp report also made it clear that there would be a continuing need for a Government-backed reinsurance facility in the case of political-risk exports. In this

legislation, however, the Government are proposing to limit their commitment to political-risk reinsurance for three years. The Minister today has sought to soften this particular commitment by saying that there would be some mechanism for reviewing the situation. Perhaps the Minister can tell us where the figure of three years came from and how it was arrived at. It seems a very arbitrary limit indeed. Perhaps he will specify in more detail what measures will be taken if, at the end of the three-year period, it is quite obvious that there is no real willingness on the part of the private sector to offer a reinsurance service, which is certainly needed.

At the same time as privatising ISG, the Government seem determined to weaken the project division of ECGD, which is to remain part of Government. The Minister has already referred to the changes which are part of the new portfolio management system for calculating the premiums that exporters will have to pay, and we know these will mean steep increases and a more expensive export service for medium and long-term exports. I understand that, overall, ECGD premiums are higher than those of most of our main competitors. There is much concern among exporters about what is happening.

All the Government's proposals—the immediate privatisation of ISG, the three-year limit on reinsurance and the introduction of the portfolio management system—are designed to ensure that British exporters get a poorer deal than their competitors. That is the real consequence of the Bill.

Not surprisingly, there has been an almost uniformly hostile reaction to the Bill. The survey that was carried out by Sedgwick James, the credit insurance brokers, found that only 33 per cent. of those questioned felt that the private sector would be able to satisfy the needs of the short-term credit insurance sector. But 91 per cent. thought that the Government were being unrealistic in their stated plans to get other countries to follow their lead in cutting support to medium-term export business.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): How many people replied to that survey?

Ms. Quin: According to Sedgwick James, 60 per cent. of the people to whom it wrote replied. It tried to make it as reasonable a survey as possible. The Minister may suggest that the number was small, but much concern has been expressed by companies through chambers of commerce—the London and Birmingham chambers of commerce, for example—the British Exporters Association, the Confederation of British Industry and others. The Minister is trying to convince me that only a few firms are concerned about this, but I do not believe him. I know that that is not so.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps I can help the hon. Lady as, unfortunately, she does not know the answer. Of 7,000 exporters, 55 were surveyed.

Ms. Quin: How many companies are covered by the chambers of commerce that I have mentioned and the CBI?

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Ms. Quin: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. I should like to make some progress. He may get an opportunity to speak in the debate.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The source of the Minister's comments was the *Financial Times*, from which it appears that 92 exporters were surveyed and 55 replied. That puts a different complexion on the figure of 7,000 that he gave.

Ms. Quin: I am sure that the Minister heard what my hon. Friend said.

The overwhelming majority of respondents thought that the Government's tactics of trying to convince other countries to follow suit were unrealistic. Despite that vote of no confidence, the Government are sticking firmly to that illusion. In answer to a presumably planted question by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), the Government stated:

> "The Government intend to press in international fora for other export credit agencies to charge more economic premium rates for export credit support, but, in the meantime, ECGD will be adopting new premium rates which will be matched more closely to risk."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. *359*.]

In other words, we shall proceed no matter how slight the evidence that other countries will follow suit. That is an absurd way of proceeding and of approaching export credit support.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Lilley): Labour Members want to subsidise everything.

Ms. Quin: The Secretary of State, from a sedentary position, is saying something about us wanting to subsidise everything. That is patently untrue, as he knows. We want our exporters to have the same facilities as our major competitors. The answer is as plain and simple as that.

At the time of the Kemp review, when the Government were considering the future of ECGD, many comments were received from exporters and from large companies. Most stressed strongly the importance of the existing service. For example, Hawker Siddeley said:

> "The future of the United Kingdom capital goods industry remains—as will all our competitors—virtually totally dependent on the ability to insure export business over the medium and long term. There is no evidence that this facility exists or will exist in the private sector."

Vickers plc said:

> "another advantage in retaining the Insurance Services group as a United Kingdom government agency would be its assured access to the vast ECGD data base which may not be available to a government-controlled company supported by private sector capital."

Perhaps the Minister will respond to that point when he replies. The Credit Insurance Association said:

> "We do not believe that the private sector could assume a significant proportion of ECGD's existing functions."

Many other quotes could be given. Since publication of the Bill, many companies have expressed concern to many of my hon. Friends in whose constituencies they are located and to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) referred to Rolls-Royce in an intervention. Northern Engineering Industries, which is merged with Rolls-Royce, has written to many hon. Members expressing concern about the future of ECDG and that exporters will receive an inferior service.

Dr. Hampson: Has the hon. Lady read the evidence taken by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry from Rolls-Royce and Northern Engineering Industries, which says:

[Dr. Hampson]

"This should, in our opinion, take place as early as possible in order that ECGD's pre-eminent position in this field is not lost and continuity is preserved. Already the Dutch credit insurer is privatised and we see similar activities taking place in the relevant sectors by the French credit insurer. If the UK is to maintain its position in this field within Europe come 1992 it is important that steps are taken now to introduce private capital so that UK exporters may compete effectively with their foreign competitors."

Ms. Quin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reading that. That company wanted the same system to obtain here as on the continent. I have read that quotation and have it in front of me. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the force of its contribution is that we should be competing on equal terms. I contend that the Bill means that we shall not be competing on equal terms.

The timing of the Bill irritated many exporters and industrialists. It appeared just before the Christmas recess, with little publicity, and was orginally timed to be debated in the week of the UN Gulf deadline. That is typical of the rather furtive way in which the Government have treated the ECGD issue. The proposals on its future were first announced by the Government in a written answer to a planted question, rather than, as we had asked, in an oral statement on the Floor of the House, which would have enabled hon. Members properly to question the Minister. The privatisation of ISG was originally scheduled by the Government for April, but because of various difficulties that will not happen until July at the earliest.

The furtive and incompetent way in which the Government have introduced the Bill perhaps has much to do with the fact that they are divided about it. There is no doubt that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury hold different views on it, and perhaps the Minister will give us some details of that. At the time of the Kemp review, it was known that the Treasury, or some in the Treasury, favoured the so-called zero option, ending Government support for export credit even for the medium and long term. The previous Secretary of State was well known as a hardliner on export support, and it was rumoured that he might consider privatising all the Department's work in export support.

There are still disagreements between the Treasury and the Department of Industry, as is clear from a leaked memo that was reported in *The Guardian* recently from the Private Secretary to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the Private Secretary of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I apologise if that sounds like a passage from "Yes Minister", but the relevant extract says:

"As for the short-term business, as you know the Chief Secretary is very concerned about your Secretary of State's proposals for large-scale government support for the privatised company."

That shows clear disagreement between the two Departments. The same memo refers rather ominously to "outstanding policy issues on reinsurance and national interest."

Perhaps the Minister could give us details of the exact disagreements. The present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was previously a Treasury Minister. I wonder whether his promotion has changed his view. I also wonder what are the views of the various Ministers in the Chamber on the issue. It seems that different Ministers have different views.

In a letter to me some time ago, the previous Trade Minister, Lord Trefgarne, said:

"I am sure that the changes . . . are essential to enable ECGD to maintain and improve the quality of its support to UK exporters."

What is the justification for that statement? I see the Minister for Trade nodding, so presumably he agrees with the statement. What studies have been done on the damage that the proposals are likely to do to industry? It is not clear why Ministers make sweeping statements without giving further justification.

Clearly, the Government are rushing to privatise the insurance services group of ECGD. However, it has to be said that there do not appear to be many bidders in the running for it. Perhaps the small number of bidders causes the Government some embarrassment. Furthermore, there are question marks about the suitability of some bidders and the consequences on the wider market if they acquire ISG. If ECGD's main competitor, Trade Indemnity, acquires the insurance services group, will there be a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission because of its dominance of the United Kingdom credit insurance industry? It would be ironic if the Government, claiming as they so often do that privatisation will increase choice, are responsible for eliminating what choice exists in the export credit market.

If the Dutch insurer NCM acquired ISG, would it have the promotion of British exports at heart? As the official Dutch credit insurer, its remit is to help Dutch exports. In any case, it would be absurd and unfair if Dutch companies which used NCM's services were entitled to the back-up provided by the Dutch Government while British companies using the service were not entitled to such Government back-up.

If ECGD were sold to a company without much expertise in export credit services, would not our exporters lose in the long run? Such questions are important. I want the Government to tell us how many bidders are currently bidding and describe the nature of some of them. Parliament is entitled to that information.

It does not seem that the sale will be a great earner for the Government. The sum of £100 million has been mentioned. Perhaps the Minister will confirm or contradict that figure. Certainly it is a small amount of money. It might keep our under-funded health service going for an hour or so, but it would hardly tackle any of the long-term problems of our country, for which public expenditure is badly needed. What is the Government's estimate?

Unfortunately, we are handicapped in our work on the sale because financial details have not been made available to Parliament, even though some financial details have been made available to bidders. I noted that the Secretary of State said that he would make some information available in the Library. Will he make available the details that have been given so far to bidders but to which Members of Parliament have not been given access?

Even possible purchasers have not been able to bid in full knowledge of the facts. For example, in the information memorandum first issued by Samuel Montagu on behalf of the Secretary of State, bidders were given no information on the extent of Government support for reinsurance after the sale. Indeed, the relevant section of the memorandum reads:

"Decisions on the scale and detail of government participation in the reinsurance arrangements for the new company will be taken when the outcome of the discussions with private sector reinsurers is known."

That is hardly helpful to bidders who want some idea of the commitment that they will be taking on.

The consequences of the proposed sell-off on the rest of ECGD cause the Opposition considerable anxiety. The losses of ECGD's projects side are considerable for the reasons to which I referred earlier. Therefore, there is a fear among exporters that once ISG is sold off, the rest of ECGD will be vulnerable to continued Treasury sniping —especially given the details of the Treasury's view which I gave earlier. Exporters also fear that ECGD will not be able to fulfil its proper role in promoting British exports in new and sometimes difficult markets.

ECGD is already being forced to take a hard line on cover for certain countries. The portfolio management system will simply make that worse. Indeed, exporters have told me that the uncertainty surrounding ECGD handicaps them when trying to win contracts. They cannot be sure what element of the equation the ECGD contribution will constitute. I hope that the Minister will comment on that. I have contacts with exporters who feel that deals are being held up because of the uncertainty surrounding ECGD.

Furthermore, the ECGD has been forced to take a particularly hard line on trade with eastern Europe, even though for both political and long-term economic considerations, links between Britain and eastern Europe need to be strengthened. It is ironic that the CBI recently launched an initiative to promote trade with three eastern European countries and the Soviet Union when of those four countries, three are off ECGD cover. That certainly does not make the CBI's role easy. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether that position will change because it certainly needs to change.

We all remember the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), declaring that Mr. Gorbachev was a man with whom she could do business. Yet ironically, even before the recent sad events in the Baltic states took place, we were doing far less business with the Soviet Union than we did with the old, repressive but, I suppose, horribly reliable regime. The Government must address that issue quickly. It affects exporters in many parts of the United Kingdom. Indeed, I read recently that even the Scottish Herring Buyers Association was having difficulty in selling to eastern Europe as a result of the withdrawal of ECGD cover. It is important to have Government support for exports in such markets for both economic and political reasons. It is unlikely that the private sector, which must continually be mindful of short-term profits, could support such trade.

Throughout their term of office, the Government have claimed that they want a level playing field in Europe so that our industry can compete on equal terms. I state again that the Bill will do nothing to achieve that aim. Indeed, it will do the opposite. We should aim to give ECGD the same flexibility as COOFACE in France to compete for business in Europe but at the same time it should enjoy a similar degree of Government support for political risk reinsurance for medium and long-term exports. Why did not the Government simply seek to amend the ECGD terms of reference to give it that flexibility and those opportunities? Did they consider such a course? If not, why not?

We have many specific worries and reservations about the clauses and provisions of the Bill which I do not have time to list now but which will certainly be thoroughly aired in Committee. We are worried about the effects on the work force, particularly in Cardiff, employment prospects and, for example, pension rights. There has been a lack of consultation with the work force, much of which has been loyal to ECGD over many years and surely has a real stake and interest in the future of ECGD.

It is clear that the Bill is an ill thought out measure which has been introduced in an incompetent and secretive manner. It is the result of departmental battles in which the privatisation dogmatists and cost cutters have won. Once again, the Government have shown themselves to be the anti-industry party which, for short-term and cost cutting considerations, is prepared to sacrifice our long-term economic well-being. The Opposition will rightly oppose the Bill, subject it to rigorous scrutiny in Committee and use every opportunity to point out not just to industry, but to the general public, just how foolish and ill-judged a measure it is.

5.30 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): I wish to declare an interest as non-executive chairman of GEC-Marconi.

The Bill is important because adequate financing arrangements are fundamentally important to successful export activity, on which the country's economic health depends.

There is a significant shortcoming in the philosophy that has underpinned our export credit activity for many years. That philosophy has been to offer credit only in a reactive manner, when our competitors have made a credit package offer and we have to match it or lose out. I know several cases in which a British product has won the support of a foreign purchaser in terms of performance, product support and delivery dates, only for the deal to be held up on the credit aspect, while other competitors are encouraged to enter the fray and improve their bids. Had our companies been able to make a pre-emptive credit offer at an earlier stage, a deal could have been concluded.

In some cases, the contract is lost following extensive negotiations, but in other cases—this is almost worse—the contract is secured after lengthy reactive responses by ECGD, but has cost us far more in the end than if our companies had been able to make a carefully judged pre-emptive credit offer earlier. I emphasise that I do not speak as, or on behalf of—to quote from today's *Financial Times*—the

"whingeing exporters who want to give British exports away to countries that are unlikely to pay for them."

There are many British companies that have developed their export markets on the back of original contracts which contained export finance and which may have been more generous than the Treasury at the time would have liked. Much export business is long-term business, and the key factor is the ability to break into the market in the first place.

It should not be necessary to state such truisms in this country, which is so dependent on trade. I am not in any way averse to the concept of private capital being introduced into a hitherto Government agency, as one might expect from a Conservative Member—far from it. I also accept that, with the onset of the single Eurpoean market, it is clean and neat to make some new arrangements. But I am concerned about some of the assumptions that seem to underlie the Bill.

First, I see no signs of any of our EC partners other than Denmark, making similar arrangements. The

[Sir Geoffrey Pattie]

obsessional phrase these days—the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) has already used it—is "level playing fields". In view of my earlier comments about the structural disadvantages for British exporters over the years, I hope that the Government will not be naive and assume that our partners and competitors will automatically seek to bring their arrangements into line with ours.

I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister winds up, he will give us details about exactly what our EC partners are doing, because there is an element of hearsay about present examples, which are not exact. The House needs an assurance that the Government will continue to provide support, including support in the national interest, for exporters on terms at least comparable with those offered to our competitors.

Secondly, the privatisation of the insurance services group will make the projects group position all the more exposed. I know that some in industry fear that the Bill could be a precursor to the abolition of the projects group, and I should like a reassurance on that.

Thirdly, for the smaller exporter, the presence of ECGD insurance—the fact that the small exporter has got it—enhances the quality of the exporter's receivables, thus creating an improved borrowing base when negotiating vital capital borrowings from his banker. That last point was made in virtually those words by Lloyds bank in its evidence to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

Fourthly, there are anxieties in some quarters about the capability and appetite of the private market to provide reinsurance. The three-year guarantee proposed by the Government may not be long enough. After all, the Kemp report spoke of a four to five-year transitional period. I should like an assurance that the Government will review the working of the system within three years of the legislation coming into effect. Industry would be entitled to expect that such a review should examine the successes and failures of the privatisation up to that stage and consider the issue of the Government continuing with some measure of support.

I know that many hon. Members want to contribute to the debate so I shall conclude by saying that, in introducing the Bill, the Government need to reassure industry. Times are hard, and markets are tough. The 1978 Act talked of "encouraging" exporters; the Bill uses the phrase "facilitating". That does not sound like a Bill with the degree and element of full-hearted, warm, supportive commitment that the industry would like and the economy needs.

5.37 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I am proud to say that I am the president of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union. I hope that others who have to declare an interest can say, like me, that they are not paid for holding the office and do not receive any reward for it. However, the Bill affects many of my 650,000 members. Certainly it will withdraw an important ability to export from the two thirds of those members involved in manufacturing industry.

The Minister referred to the esteemed Lord Young, who used to provide the previous Prime Minister with solutions—thank goodness he has gone. The Minister also referred to the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—thank goodness he has gone; he would have got rid of all the support given to British exporters. The present Secretary of State is not a great deal different from the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, but at least the total service is not being mutilated, if we are to believe what the Minister said.

It is noticeable that, although the Bill affects 25 per cent. of our exports, two very junior Ministers have been left to put the case for it to the House. One very new Minister, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, will reply to the debate.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): It is sinister.

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) says that it is sinister; I shall leave it to him to expand that point in his speech.

I should congratulate the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on his elevation to the Front Bench. As an opponent of his, I have not yet had an opportunity to do so, but I hope that he can provide some of the answers that were not provided by the Minister of Trade.

It was shown to me yesterday just how essential the Export Credits Guarantee Department is. I was in Liverpool talking to a company executive, who said that 86 per cent. of his product was exported. The company is in the Mexican market. The executive to whom I spoke was aghast that there could be any change in relation to export credit guarantees. He pointed out to me that the company is already 16 per cent. adrift of the terms of the Spanish offer in that market. It is able to remain only because of the quality of its product. When a firm starts from scratch in a new market, it will not have the advantage that customers already know their product.

The unwillingness of the private sector to provide this type of cover has been demonstrated in the past. Without such cover, many successful export initiatives would have been lost to this country. This is a blow to our export performance, and it comes at a time when our trade deficit is £15 billion. What a time for the Government to take another swipe at exporters and make life more difficult for them. I should have thought that the Government would be anxious to do the opposite, that they would want to strengthen the position of those entering the export market—a difficult field—and do all they possibly can for them, rather than injure them.

As has been stressed, privatisation applies to small and medium-sized firms—the ones that need most help. They are the companies that provide the dynamic element in our industry. It is they that initiate. They are also the ones, I regret to say, that suffer most from the Government's economic policy. Many of them have gone or are going out of business as a result of high interest rates and a very difficult home market. In their attempts to survive, they have had to turn to the export market.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): A group in Nottinghamshire has three factories in my constituency. Not long ago, it was praised by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who used to be Prime Minister, for its marvellous export record. Despite that, one of the five factories in the group closed as a result of the Government's policies. Yet it was making a marvellous export contribution. I support what my hon. Friend has

said about small and medium-sized factories, which have made such a contribution, being clobbered by the policies of a wicked Government.

Mr. Hoyle: I could not agree more. Indeed, praise from the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when she was Prime Minister, or—even worse—a visit by her to a factory, was usually followed by the firm's going into receivership.

Small and medium-sized firms ought to be encouraged to get into the export market, yet the Government are removing the prop that they need. These are the firms that are most at risk, the ones least able to bear the burden, the ones that will suffer most when a customer defaults. It is wrong that such firms should be left to the vagaries of the free market, yet that is what the Government are intent on doing.

Even Conservative Members have asked who will take over this function. Will a private monopoly be created? I should be interested to hear what the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), who said he was a creditor consultant, might say about maintaining competition in the market. What is going to be done to help the small and medium-sized firms that will find it so difficult to survive? I hope that they can be reassured. It would be interesting to hear the defence of this monopoly.

Mr. Hind: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the Export Credits Guarantee Department is not the only organisation in this field. There is a private insurance market that is used quite widely by small firms exporting from the United Kingdom. Consequently, there will not be a monopoly. In addition, other firms will have an opportunity to develop. The ECGD has tended to take on the larger projects, but there are facilities, through the projects group, to make such provision. There is not a monopoly, although it is true that one organisation will be in a dominant position.

Mr. Hoyle: We are talking about the insurance services market. What is being taken away is the public-sector element, which operates in an area into which the private sector is not prepared to go. That is the danger. In the letter that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and I wrote to *The Times*, we said that we hoped that, if this arrangement should go through, the Government would look at companies placed in this position and decide not to withdraw completely. I understood from the Minister's introductory speech—perhaps we will hear more in the reply to the debate—that it was accepted that there would still be a need for public-sector involvement in part of the market. I think that that is the point that was being made by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

Another difficulty will arise with the advent of the single market in 1992. Nothing in the legislation relating to the single market makes it necessary for the Government to take this step. We have heard that the only other Government contemplating such a course of action is the Danish Government. Certainly there is no sign of it in the case of our competitors in the European Community. I say again that, in this regard, there is no need for the Government to be a pathfinder.

At one time, I thought that the whole operation of the ECGD would be destroyed. I am very pleased that the judgment of the Kemp report—that there is no alternative to a Government scheme if our exports are to remain competitive—has been accepted. Privatisation of the insurance group will secure the short-term credit proposals. However, this change is unnecessary and unwanted, and it will not reassure industry. The danger is that it could do great harm to British exports.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) said, we are facing not only the single European market in 1992, which will bring with it more competition, but the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the eastern economy. There are more opportunities, but they will bring with them new uncertainties and risks. We should be encouraging companies to break into these new markets. They will deal with new ventures and new trading records and may be facing an uncertain future. They will have little market expertise, no credit history and therefore no credit rating. I am sorry to say that they will have to do all this against a background of continuing political uncertainty. If we are asking small and medium firms to enter that difficult market, it is incumbent on us to give them every possible support. Because the Bill will not do that, it is wrong to introduce it at this time.

The Gulf crisis proves that the risks for exporters have never been greater. Along with that risk, there are opportunities for exporters, and we are asking only for some help for them. Why should we tell them that they can go into the markets, but must do so with one hand tied behind their backs? We must ask why the Government have, against the advice in the Kemp report and against the lack of demand from exporters who said that they were satisfied with the ECGD, introduced the Bill at this difficult time. We heard no good reason from the Minister for Trade, so we do not know why the Government intend to place a further burden on the back of British industry, which is already reeling because of the difficult recession.

It has been suggested that the Bill has been introduced so as to bring us into line with EC policy, but that is not necessary. We see the difficulties for people entering the private sector underwriting business. There is no need for the Bill, and the exporters have not demanded it. The real reason for it is the Government's ideological and political prejudice. Once more, dogma is taking over from common sense. The Government have a hatred of everything that is in the public sector. They have to go for privatisation, whether or not it is better.

The Government should think again before inflicting this blow on British industry. The Minister for Trade is no longer here, so I ask the Under-Secretary not to stay within the Department and just have dinner with his colleagues. He should go out into the real world and see the difficulties that these companies are facing. He should seek their advice instead of doing what he thinks is best, because the Government think that everything must be privatised. If the Under-Secretary did that, he would come back with different opinions, and opinions different from those expressed by the Minister for Trade. The Prime Minister may have changed, but Government policy has not.

The Minister said the staff at Cardiff would be transferred to the private sector. What happens to the staff who do not want to be transferred? Will they be allowed to remain in Government service? Will they have a career? Will they be able to use their expertise? It is essential that we get some replies to those questions, because these people have done a first-class job, as British industry and

[Mr. Hoyle]

exporters have recognised. Anyone who cares about British companies and British exports should reject the Bill. I hope that the House decides to do just that.

5.55 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I start by declaring my interest in the Hill and Smith group.

I thought that there would be agreement on a wide range of points across the House. I believe that there is that agreement, although the speeches from the two Front Bench spokesmen did not make it apparent. I say this for the simple reason that, as has been said before, we are a trading nation. We are a nation that succeeds or fails economically on its ability to export. Economically, we live or die by the success of our exporting industry. On that at least, we can agree.

An exporting nation must ensure the security of those in the business of exporting goods. It must consider what is necessary in the insurance structures that underpin that. In this day and age, a trading nation cannot thrive without having some structure or infrastructure to take care of the insurance aspect of exports. I am sure that that fact must be common ground across the Floor of the House. In a sense, all that we are talking about is how that is to be achieved.

The single criterion on which one can judge whether the Bill deserves the support of the House is this. Will it make better or will it make worse the position of exporters? Will it improve the security of exporters, in so far as one can have security in such a risky trade? The Bill succeeds or fails on its ability to fulfil that one central point.

When one considers the needs and demands of those who export, it is clear that there are only two options. There can be disagreement about which option to go for, but one has to be chosen. In so far as one can detect a policy from what we heard from the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) she appeared to be supporting the first option—maintaining the status quo. I do not say this in an adversarial way, but I am sometimes slightly surprised by the conservatism of Labour Members. They appear to think that, because something has been done—in some ways very successfully—in one way, looking at it in terms of future demands and needs, and because there is a good idea in there trying to break out, that is bad. One of the curious things about our debates is, at times, the radicalism shown by those on the Government Benches and the conservatism shown by those on the Opposition Benches.

Ms. Quin: I did not defend the status quo. I said that there needed to be changes so that the ECGD could take advantage of the European market, but that I did not like the changes proposed by the Government because I felt that they would weaken, rather than strengthen, us in the face of our European competitors.

Mr. Nicholls: It is one thing to say that one is not in favour of the status quo, but that position becomes somewhat less convincing if one takes a very dogmatic attitude to any of the reasonable, feasible proposals which are put forward against it. I shall develop my argument and if the hon. Lady is still not totally convinced, I shall give way again, if necessary.

The only two options that hon. Members need to think about in considering what is the appropriate insurance structure is either to maintain the status quo or something pretty close to it. In other words, we should leave it up to the state or, alternatively, turn it over to the market. The moment one talks about turning this over to the market, one can almost hear Labour Members writhing and taking the view that that lets in laissez-faire politics. To use a much more neutral word in the more neutral times in which we live, it is not so much a question of leaving it to the market; it is a question of leaving it to those who actually know how to handle these things. I am referring to the people with particular expertise and particular interests.

In other words, one is saying that, rather than this being done by the state, it would be better if the whole insurance infrastructure so far as possible were left to the private insurance industry. As a politician and an ex-Minister and as somebody who has worked with civil servants and who has high regard for them, for the most part I prefer to confine politicians and civil servants to those things which politicians and civil servants, by their talent or lack of it, are qualified to do. I do not see it as the role of politicians and civil servants to get involved overly much in matters which could be more properly accommodated by those who actually know how to do them.

If one accepts, as I do, that the right way forward for insurance in terms of exports will for the most part lie in the private sector, then certain considerations and consequences flow from that. One of them must be examined and thought about, although at the end of the day it is not the fundamental criterion to which I referred a moment or two ago. One consequence will be the employment effects for those who are employed within the present structure. I accept that to the hilt. I have a particular interest and I shall refer to that aspect in a moment or two. As I have said, it does not seem to me that the status quo is a viable option. The only sensible option that remains is that which underpins the Bill, which is to privatise this sector of the ECGD and to proceed in that way.

In this debate, the Kemp report has assumed almost the importance of the Bible on the basis that we have all decided to quote it for our own purposes. Inevitably, when dealing with such a report one has more or less to dine a la carte. I do not think that it would be appropriate even in a debate such as this to quote the Kemp report at any great length; it may be that others will wish to do so rather more in extenso. But it is a fair point to make that that report recommended, albeit over a slightly different time scale, what the Government are now doing in this Bill.

Of course, times move on, and the point has already been rightly made that the report was commissioned two years ago. That has implications in terms of the European dimension and I shall touch upon that topic in a moment. It must be said that there is increasing competition in the credit insurance market both in the United Kingdom and in the European community. Obviously that is led and generated by the private sector and we cannot turn our face against it.

We also have to face the fact that in the EC credit insurers are increasingly offering policies which cover both domestic and export credit possibilities. Once again that is a relatively new and increasing factor which must be taken into account. That is a trend which, in my judgment, can only be intensified by the EC directives we have seen of late

in the non-life insurance sector of the industry who allow private sector insurers registered in one state to do business in another state in the community, provided that those are private firms and do not operate with state backing.

For the purposes of this debate I do not have to say whether it is a good idea or not, but the fact is that that is the world in which we live and that is what is coming out of Europe. For better or worse, I say, gritting my teeth, that that is something we simply have to live with. That is the fact of life in Europe at the moment. If the insurance firms concerned are state backed as opposed to being backed by private firms, they will be unable to operate. Therefore, I believe that it is unrealistic to look at what the position was in 1988 when the report was first commissioned. We should look at the position in which we find ourselves today. We must face up to that consideration.

Where do we go from here? What other possibilities remain? One point that occurred to me when I was preparing my thoughts for this debate, and it is a point touched upon by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), relates to the possibility of altering the enabling legislation. I understand that that would be possible. It would be feasible, in the short term at least, to alter the legislation so that that section of the ECGD could compete for business other than that to which it is presently confined. In a sense that would be worth while. There would be the possibility of other forms of trade, other business or cross-subsidy. Once that is done we have to face the European dimension and how we cope with it. If we proceed in that way, we may be able to loosen things up in the foreseeable future, but after that we shall have all sorts of problems.

Again reference has been made, and it is a theme that will run through this debate, to article 92 of the treaty of Rome which makes it quite clear, as I understand it, that any insurance agencies which adopt policies which in a sense provide aid and in so doing distort competition are likely to be outlawed. I can understand people making the point that this has not happened yet, but that carries the same sort of conviction as the character who falls out of a 20-storey building and who, as he hurtles past the 18th floor, says, "So far so good."

Mr. Alex Carlile: I ask a question in a genuine thirst for knowledge. The hon. Gentleman said a little earlier in his speech that the fact that Mr. Kemp reported two years ago has some implications for Europe. In fact, Mr. Kemp reported 18 months ago, but that is not a point that I wish to press. Article 92, as I understand it, has not changed in that 18 or 19-month period. So what are these implications which arise from the fact that Mr. Kemp reported some little time ago? I should be interested to know the hon. Gentleman's view.

Mr. Nicholls: That is a very fair point, it touches particularly on the European dimension, and I shall move to that almost immediately. The significance of the Kemp report is that it was commissioned in 1988 and published in 1989. There is not much point in working out precisely the month in which a particular event took place. I am saying that when one is dealing with Europe one has to try to keep ahead of the game. One must try to foresee the way in which fashions in Europe are going, rather than finding at the last moment that one has a problem to cope with.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The hon. Gentleman agreed that the question on intervention was reasonable. Will he please answer it? This Government do not have a reputation for trying to stay ahead of developments in Europe on the environment, agriculture, trade and industry or anything else. On this issue, time and again we have been asking Ministers to tell us what are the legislation and regulations concerned and the reasons for jumping in this fashion. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us?

Mr. Nicholls: As I said when replying to the more helpful and more thought-out intervention of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), the fashions in Europe will change. Fashions do change. Anyone who has ever been involved in considering the social charter will know that once an idea gathers force in Europe, Europe and the European institutions may seem rather slow moving and monolithic. When the process of change starts, it is essential to keep ahead of the game. That was the point that I was making. I said that I would deal with that topic in my own time, and I shall.

Mr. Norris: I commend my hon. Friend for what he says. He has hit the mark. There is no need to be sidetracked down a legalistic alley by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). It is clear from article 92 of the treaty of Rome that the whole drift of competition policy is against Government intervention to distort competition. Therefore, my hon. Friend was right in his analogy of the so-far-so-good victim of a defenestration. As my hon. Friend suggests, were we not now to take account of the fact that European rules will inevitably lead to the point where Government subsidy of this sort of service is outlawed, the Government would be failing in their duty to the very exporters whom the Bill aims to support.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend has it exactly. The point in essence is simply that, if any hon. Member thinks that an article in the treaty of Rome, which could be used to Britain's detriment, would be allowed to lie fallow in Europe, he would not be living in the real world. The point simply illustrates the utter confusion in the minds of Opposition Members. From being violently and rabidly anti-Europe, they have become so communautaire that recently, when I attended an assize held in Rome which was the first conference of EC Parliaments, the Labour delegation voted to accept, virtually without amendment, a communiqué calling for economic and political union. It was not a question of them suddenly deciding to dip their toes in the water. They went from violent opposition to ecstatic surrender.

Mr. Haynes: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would be fairer than to accuse Labour Members in that way on Europe. When the decision was made in the House to go into Europe, Members on both sides were opposed to it, so the hon. Gentleman should be fair about it.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman knows the high regard in which I hold him. I would be upset if I thought that, whatever else he thought about my views, he thought that I was being unfair to him. The only point that I was trying to make, in my usual helpful and non-adversarial way, was simply that, if one were looking for a consistent policy on Europe one might be expected to find it in a party which, for all its internal divisions on the subject and

[Mr. Nicholls]

for all its changes in emphasis, has at least maintained a consistent position before the electorate. If the hon. Gentleman feels that I was less than fair in making that point, I can understand it.

What alternatives to the ideas put forward in the Bill have come from Opposition Members? We have heard that they think that the status quo could be altered to advantage. We have not heard precisely how, but we know that it must not be altered in this way. But it is difficult to find a consistent policy from Opposition Members. The moment the word privatisation is mentioned it is like red rag to a bull. The Bill was described by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) as an exercise in dogma, or something like that. It would be difficult to find a more dogmatic and doctrinaire attitude than that of the Opposition who say that they do not like what there is at the moment, that they have no idea how to change it, but that they do know that anything that the Government come up with will be unacceptable.

Mr. Hoyle: I said that not only did I think that the Government were making a change for the sake of it, but that the exporters did not want such change. It is not a matter of dogma on our side or on your side. It is you who insist on instituting such a change against the advice of those who use the service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not my dogma.

Mr. Hoyle: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You never believe in dogma. You are very fair.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no dogmatic or doctrinaire attitudes on the Conservative Benches, either.

Once again, the Opposition raised the terrible bogey man of what would happen if some foreign country were to take over. It is remarkable that, despite the Opposition's communautaire policy which leads them to go to Rome and, in a spirit of enthusiastic surrender, yield themselves up to European union, the moment that there is a possibility of a foreign company having an interest in Britain, the Opposition are prepared to go to the barricades about it.

Export is a two-way street. The idea that we can have some mad, potty world in which all we have to do is to export our goods, industries and services without making provision for the import of services and goods is unreal. Whether a Dutch or any other company were to have such an interest in a reinsurance firm within the private sector, at the end of the day it would be acting for the reason that business men always will act—to make a profit. It is that word again. The idea that some private company would try to so construct its insurance arrangements as to make it virtually impossible for Britain to export in such a situation to do themselves some good is a marvellous idea, an exercise in a certain type of xenophobia, but at the end of the day it is completely unreal.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) had a pile of papers a great deal larger than mine and I was waiting for her to read them, but I am happy to say that that did not happen. One of those papers was pink and it occurred to me that it might be today's *Financial Times*. Picking up a theme that I have heard so many times from the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) I thought that the hon. Lady, knowing of commentaries which are quite against the position that she has adopted, would bring them to the House, almost as one would do in a court of law, and say that although she has come up with ideas, as one would expect, some of the evidence was against her.

Perhaps the hon. Lady will refer to the *Financial Times* when she replies instead, but I suspect not, and one can see why.

In today's *Financial Times* there was a lengthy critique entitled "Breaking Cover at ECGD". Because the paper's name sounds vaguely capitalistic, some might have the idea that it is a rabid tabloid which panders to the worst fantasies of the right of the Conservative party. But that optimistic view, which I should like to think was true, is not borne out. Anyone who has had any acquaintance with the *Financial Times*, especially on employment matters, and has seen the way in which they are handled, will know that it writes with great knowledge and with some considerable skill, not automatically from a pro-Government point of view.

Today's *Financial Times* has a number of things to say about the Bill and what our attitude to it should be. It picks up exactly the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery a few moments ago. It starts by reviewing at some length the sort of difficulties in and objections to the Bill. It makes the point that the Kemp report, if not all things to all men, certainly has something for everybody. But it then goes on to say:

"None of these is ground for abandoning a sale whose original motive remains valid."

It continues:

"Without new freedoms ECGD will lose ground to UK and continental competitors."

That is exactly right. The *Financial Times* has no axe to grind. That is its reading of the situation. It goes on:

"Admittedly, privatisation has not yet been forced on the government by the European Commission. Simply changing ECGD's charter might allow it scope to compete in the single market."

Then it comes to a point which is obvious to anybody who has had any contact with Europe, whether within or without government, in terms of the real world. It says:

"But Brussels is looking much more closely at subsidies implicit in export credit insurance. Privatisation is much the cleanest approach."

That is what is being said. That is not the situation that existed 10 years ago, or even five years ago. That is what the *Financial Times* says today about this measure—that privatisation is by far the cleanest approach; that we should not take comfort from the fact that the European Community has not done it yet; and, most important of all, we should recognise there are difficulties but we should not make the mistake of thinking that those difficulties are insurmountable.

On employment prospects, I was extremely pleased to see that the duty regulations are there so that provisions relating to redundancy will be continued and that there will be continuity of employment. Some people may claim that that is the minimum requirement, but there is not just the standard protection of the regulations; there is also protection for the enhanced redundancy payment as well. The point has been made very forcefully that transfer will have to be voluntary; that there will be no compulsion. The terms and conditions will be at least as good. Clause 9 provides quite specifically for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations in the way that I have described.

It could be asked whether that gives total protection. Could the Minister or anyone else absolutely guarantee

that the position of the civil servants who transfer will be precisely the same so that their jobs are secure? Of course not. Surely we have moved away, have we not, from the idea that there is any such thing as total security in employment?

If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were working in the ECGD and were concerned about your job prospects, would you feel safer in a structure which takes account of the changing times and of the fact that one cannot continue in the old ways for ever, but at the same time says that as far as possible the previous conditions enjoyed in the civil service regime will be replicated under the new regime? That is not a guarantee because there is no such thing, but it is really the very best deal that can be obtained in the circumstances.

Yes, there can be problems in setting up a structure in this way. As in any legislation, one is trying to look into the future on the basis of the best information that one can get. If we look at what is happening in Europe today and at what exporters need and if we look at the Kemp report in the light of where we are now, not back in 1988, we realise that this Bill and the policies in it are the right ones for our exports. That is why the House should support this Bill.

6.23 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): In the part of Wales where I live, it is normal at funerals to spend a little time praising the deceased. Therefore, I think it is right to start my speech by saying that the Export Credits Guarantee Department has done an excellent job for many years and that many industrialists, and other people who are beginning their business lives as entrepreneurs building up manufacturing industries, view with some alarm the change that they see taking place, the consequences of which they are unsure of. Change for change's sake cannot be justified; but if the change is to produce a more beneficial export environment for potential exporters, the Government will have succeeded in their aims, whether these are brought about by dogma or on empirical grounds.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. and learned Member should make it perfectly clear that ECGD is not dying; it is going to a better place.

Mr. Carlile: It is a bit of a mixed bag, because part of the ECGD will continue to survive. This is a form of medicine that we have yet to apply to human beings. Part of it is possibly going to some other place, and the hon. Member has a particular interest in that place, which he has frankly declared; that is probably why he thinks it is better.

This Bill emanates from a Government Department which has become renowned for the political and economic dryness of its Ministers. They are dry and proud of it—drier than those in any other Government Department. Indeed, it is a Department in which those copies of the former Prime Minister's Bruges speech which are not framed are heavily dog-eared through repeated reading, in an effort to check that what is being done fulfils the requirements of "Brugesism".

It follows that this anticipatory obedience which the Department of Trade and Industry wants to show to a possible future interpretation of article 92 of the treaty of Rome is a little uncharacteristic. I have been trying to think of an analogy, and the best I can come up with is that of the footballer who rushes up to the referee during the first half and says, "Excuse me, ref, but I anticipate committing a professional foul in the second half, so would you please show me the yellow card now to try to stop me doing it then?"

That is certainly not a characteristic approach by this Government and one is tempted to the view that, although dogma may sometimes be logical—it may be the best basis for a decision if it is right—there is nonetheless more than a suspicion of dogma in this early progress by the Government to privatising the insurance services group of ECGD.

Mr. Norris: The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the attitude to Europe of Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry. As the only wet ever to have survived in the Department—and that was not for long—I cannot comment on that. If there is a cynicism among some people in this country about Europe and the difference between what is said and what is done in Europe, it is precisely because in Britain it is clear that progress towards the single market, which is the single greatest manifestation of something practical that can happen in Europe, is much further advanced than elsewhere, where there are many more interventions by state organisations than in the United Kingdom.

While I do not want to interrupt the flow of the hon. and learned Gentleman's argument or his interest in Gazza analogies, may I suggest that it is entirely proper that this Government should now be addressing the question of anticipatory legislation in the right spirit—that is, believing in the single market and wanting to see it completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Carlile: As ever, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) makes a very interesting point. However, I am slightly puzzled by the logical analysis he makes, because it seems to me that, in the decision they have taken in this Bill, the Government are running the risk of putting British potential exporters at a disadvantage compared with some of their European competitors, whereas in some other respects, such as going enthusiastically for 1992, they are trying to put British industry at an advantage compared with some other countries which may in certain respects have been a little slow.

I believe that it is contradictory to the future practical prospects of the export credit guarantee systems, and of exporters, to privatise the insurance services in this way and at this stage. It would have been far better for detailed discussions to take place within the European Community, so that we would have a clear picture of the way in which other member states were likely to react to the possible breach—it is only a possible breach—of article 92.

The phrase "level playing field" has already been mentioned often in this debate. It is important that our exporters should not find that, as a result of a Government decision the motive for which is privatisation, they are at a disadvantage because other countries have not only failed to move as quickly towards obedience to the interpretation of article 92 in relation to 1992, but have no intention whatsoever of doing so. Our anticipatory obedience to article 92 is a clear potential disadvantage for British exporters.

[Mr. Carlile]

Insurance—particularly export credit insurance, which is a form of factoring—is a high-risk business, as I am sure the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) who declared an interest in Trade Indemnity, would readily acknowledge. It is therefore a business in which the initial profit discount, or premium, must be fairly high. There is a danger that a company in the private sector will be forced in certain transactions to set its premiums so high that smaller companies will be unable to manufacture goods or to provide services and sell them at the net price that they will receive.

That is not a criticism of companies such as Trade Indemnity. In the ordinary commercial sphere, they provide an important service—for example, in respect of straightforward commercial factoring—but it is one generally taken up by companies that are in the growth phase of their existence and not in their early stages, nor in their later stages either.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes a fair point about a matter of some concern to small and medium-sized businesses. However, he may agree that an important point of principle is at issue in respect of reinsurance. The strength of reinsurance is the test of availability of cover. Those who oppose the Bill argue that the strength of reinsurance provided by the Government's bottomless pit—that is, the taxpayer—represents strong reinsurance cover and that it has to be demonstrated that similar cover will be available in future.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and valid point, and it is well taken. However, at this stage in my argument I am more concerned about the initial situation, when a potential exporter tries to obtain a guarantee. If I were a small manufacturer of goods for which I saw export potential in, for example, a South American country, I would be concerned not so much about the reinsurance aspect as about the amount of money that either ECGD or Trade Indemnity, or whoever, will take off my price, and how much profit I will be left with at the end of the day. I believe that there is a genuine fear—which I hope will prove unjustified—that small companies will find it difficult to trade in exports to risk countries if they are confronted with the high premiums which I anticipate.

The Kemp report did not recommend that the Government should aspire to withdrawing their support completely. It stated:

"This would be a very high risk policy and would be strongly opposed by industry. It is unlikely that the private sector would adequately supply cover against political risk, for small businesses, or provide supporting advice in the way in which ECGD does at present."

That shortfall, foreseen by Mr. Kemp, will remain; and will continue to exist as a consequence of the Government's decision to privatise in a hurry.

When the Minister replies, perhaps he will explain why the Government decided to reject the option in Mr. Kemp's third recommendation, that four to five years should be allowed before introducing private capital. Ministerial statements have developed in response to that recommendation. When the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he spoke of

"converting insurance services into a company and the injection of private capital quickly thereafter."

That was something closer to Mr. Kemp's third option than the measure now before us.

By 26 July last year, the then Minister and present Secretary of State said in a written answer:

"I have decided that the short-term business of ECGD should be sold by means of a competition"

and that the sale should be completed

"as soon as possible thereafter."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1990; Vol. 177, c. *410*.]

That is, after April 1991. It would be genuinely helpful to know why the Government decided to accelerate that process in a way that is inconsistent with both the objective and the carefully researched views expressed by Kemp.

That action is not consistent either with the wishes of British commerce and industry. Earlier, there was a contentious reference to a report by the credit insurance brokers Sedgwick James, the results of which were summarised in the *Financial Times* on 10 October 1990. So that the Minister will not leap to his feet and savage me, I concede immediately that only 55 replies were received to the 92 copies of the questionnaire that were distributed —which, on the face of it, is a very small sample.

However, as the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) fairly pointed out, although some of those invited to reply were large-scale exporters, others were organisations representing large numbers of exporters in general. Bodies such as the London chamber of commerce carefully collate and cautiously analyse their members' views before expressing anything that could be remotely described as a collective opinion. Although I concede the sparsity of the sample in that survey, I hope that the Minister will recognise that at least the opinions given were informed opinions, based on careful consideration of the issues.

I should add that it is the best evidence we have. I am not aware of any other survey, or of the Government having sought to collate the type of information carefully obtained by Sedgwick James. Of the respondents to that survey, 71 per cent. said that they would review their business strategy if British export credit facilities ceased to be competitive with those of other countries, and nearly half—and this is a shocking feature—replied that they would switch productive investment and procurement to other countries having better export credit arrangements. Some companies even said that they would cease to export to certain markets, which is understandable.

This hasty legislation has been cobbled together to produce a piece of privatisation of a less contentious nature than others, one that would not attract so much public notice, to fill part of a thinnish parliamentary timetable. I suggest that at best the Bill is premature, and that at worst it is, on its merits, wrong.

6.38 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): An hour ago, I thought for a moment that, for the first time in 17 years, I would be called to speak before 6 o'clock. However, right hon. and hon. Members have been so gentlemanly and polite today in allowing many interventions that the time has moved on. Nevertheless, I am glad to be of assistance to the Treasury Bench in making an early and extended speech, rather than a late and short or squeezed contribution. I hope that my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will not take the hint and pursue it in Committee.

First, I must declare an interest as I am a consultant for a company which is an adviser to GEC.

Some of my remarks will reinforce those made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie). The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and I wrote a letter to *The Times*, as we are both members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. However, I think that our views diverge from there on, because he made certain remarks about the economic cycle, whereas it is my view that, if there is a complaint to be made, it is that the Bill should have been put before the House a year ago during the 1989-90 session —as indeed it would have been, but for a somewhat unseemly dispute between officials at the Treasury and at the Department of Trade and Industry.

I would certainly argue in favour of the merits of that part of the Bill, on the basis of the evidence heard by the Select Committee and contained in the Kemp report. I was impressed that the Kemp report did not commit itself absolutely to a long period as a Government holding company before bringing in private money. Other options are considered and some of the evidence, for example that from Rolls-Royce, suggested that the ECGD had become more commercially oriented in recent years. As a result, there had been positive benefits and it was putting together more imaginative packages. Confiscation insurance was cited as an example. The evidence also suggested that privatisation would maintain progress, at a time when there is growing demand in Europe. That is what it is all about. We were unnecessarily restricting one of our major financial industries, at a time when the European financial services market was growing.

I fully support privatisation. Nevertheless, as was pointed out in the *Financial Times*, British industry is "whingeing" about it. Let me put it another way, it is not at all happy about some of the other aspects; that is where I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton. GEC is the largest client of the ECGD, spending more than £1 billion per year in insurance. There are about 12,000 accounts. However, ECGD is not really about insurance. It has the single statutory duty of encouraging British exports, and it is in that context that British industry is expressing its unhappiness, because we have never needed exports more than we need them now. Competition has never been more fierce and there have never been such opportunities, especially those in eastern Europe at present.

That being said, if one is not careful one can come to conclusions which do not stand up, by assuming that other countries always do things better, and more generously than we do. For example, if one studies some of the evidence to the Committee about the situation in eastern Europe, it does not show that the German or Italian credit agencies were offering anything other than short-term cover, on much the same terms as the ECGD, in the Polish market.

As stated in the letter which I signed with the hon. Member for Warrington, North, my first criticism is the lack of detail during the sale, both for potential buyers and for those hon. Members who take an interest. One could argue that more information would have been available from a private company than has been available from a state operation.

A more central criticism—I am seeking further reassurance about this—is how the high political risk markets will be handled. I understood my hon. Friend the Minister, in his opening remarks, to be giving a key reassurance that there would be a period during which the new privatised company would gain reinsurance from the retained ECGD Government operation. British industry will want to know our intentions as regards the length of that period. Will it be three years, or will it be abandoned in less time? Could it run beyond three years? I think that British industry will take the view that there should not be an artificially imposed time limit.

Many people think that the private sector would not be able to pick up suitable premiums in many difficult political markets to enable smaller and medium-sized companies to get the right price for their products. Therefore, we should not abandon that principle of reinsurance, and I recommend to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that we keep the situation under review and wait to see at what stage, if any, in the near future the EC produces a directive. If, as the years go by, industry can show that there remains a real need for it, we should continue to supply back-up.

There is special concern about that aspect and the *Guardian* newspaper released some Departmental papers about it. The Treasury wrote to the Secretary of State's private secretary as follows:

> "As for the short-term business, the Chief Secretary is very concerned about your Secretary of State's proposals for continuing large-scale Government support for the privatised company"

Anyone reading that will realise that those remarks take us directly back to the zero option. Has the Treasury given up the zero option proposals? We all assumed that it had given them up for long-term projects, but that Treasury mentality seems to remain. That sort of evidence of the Government's intentions is what has been disturbing British business. We should wait and see how the situation develops.

Some of the gentlemen who gave evidence to the Committee on 4 July 1990, when asked what the ECGD's premium rates were like compared with those of our competitor countries, replied that the ECGD rates are sometimes higher by a factor of two, and occasionally more. If that situation is maintained, there will be be a level playing field.

As the letter which the hon. Member for Warrington, North and I wrote to *The Times* yesterday states, it is vital that we give an assurance to British industry that, so long as the playing fields are not even, we will use some mechanism—the reinsurance aspects of the privatised company—to enable our companies, especially small and medium-sized businesses, to have access to those markets. That is what the ECGD has always been about. It was created so that we could lower premiums and establish level playing fields.

GEC sent some comments to members of the Select Committee last week, in which it stated:

> "There is no evidence that our overseas competitors are being subjected to the same changes through a withdrawal of Government support for exports."

So, will Ministers give a commitment today that, until such time as there is evidence of similar changes for our overseas competitors, there will be a commitment to maintain support in political high-risk markets? As the GEC document points out, if one does not

> "Whereas Government has a role in trying to boost export activity, a commercial agency"

primarily has as its goal

"the maximisation of its returns".

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

and therefore is either not likely to take the risk of insurance or would substantially raise its premiums. That is a major concern.

As regards the Treasury's attitude to long-term projects, page 98 of the Kemp report states:

"As there is absolutely no prospect of a world free market, without interventions or support by governments, being established, the use of export credit agencies by competitors, within the scope of the rules of the OECD Consensus, is a fact we must take into account when deciding our own policy".

Will my hon. Friend the Minister give a complete commitment that that view is Government policy, and that no change is planned?

If we are not careful, the Treasury's thinking on industrial policy will prove to be the worst form of "short-termism" that British industry faces. The Treasury memorandum on the ECGD caused great alarm in the Select Committee, as we said in our report. According to the memorandum, the reason for the lack of private sector interest in export credit insurance was

"the existence of Government schemes. The withdrawal of such schemes should stimulate the introduction of private sector alternatives".

I do not accept that that has been proved. The memorandum also stated:

"The withdrawal of subsidies will have 'a beneficial effect upon the rest of the economy which is relieved of the burden of paying for them.'"

We encounter that sort of attitude all too often. Understandably, every Treasury has an intrinsic dislike of subsidies, and of any assistance that involves taxpayers' money. Notwithstanding that, all Exchequers in all industrialised nations provide subsidies to some extent, as they always have done in this country.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My hon. Friend is right, of course, but surely our objective should be to get rid of such subsidies across the board, so that taxpayers throughout Europe can stop financing the export of goods for which no one can pay.

Dr. Hampson: That is precisely my point. I have urged repeatedly that we should not proceed too far in the present direction. Although I accept that a privatised company will need some assistance in certain markets until the grand design has been achieved, no one who has examined the position sees any evidence that we are anywhere near that stage. I represent a textile-producing area, and I have come across the same attitude in that context—the belief that, if textile subsidies are withdrawn, consumers will instinctively buy imports because they are cheaper, and will therefore have more money in their pockets to boost other aspects of the British economy. That view is contained in the Silberston report.

The answer is that, although consumers might spend in other sectors and increase growth rates in the new service industries in the south-east, they would not necessarily spend in a way that would create or maintain jobs in the north. What that short-sighted, short-termist attitude overlooks is the "cascade effect": if the major players in the game are not assisted, all the small sub-contractors and suppliers will suffer as well. It was absurd bottom-line thinking on the part of the Treasury to predict a short-term loss of £1·5 billion per year as a result of the ending of long-term project help. The Treasury did not take into account the way in which major companies enter new markets, open them up and establish longer-term business contacts for both themselves and their suppliers.

Although I welcome unreservedly the privatisation of the short-term insurance services group, British industry undoubtedly needs reassurance that the remaining ECGD will continue to assist the new privatised company in especially politically difficult markets. We need reassurance, too, about Treasury thinking on the long-term project group. Above all, we need to create a climate in which British industry feels that it is wanted and encouraged by Government, rather than an alarmist state of mind. I believe that the British Treasury has gained far too strong a position in industrial policy making, and that that is the reason for the reaction of British industry.

6.54 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Let me join other hon. Members in declaring an interest. I act as parliamentary consultant to the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, many of whose members will be directly affected by the privatisation. I am proud of my association with the union, but, naturally, I receive a consultancy fee. I assure the House that I donate the whole of that fee to my local Labour party in Dundee. If any Conservative Members feel particularly guilty about any consultancy fees that they may receive, I recommend the same course to them. I will give them the name and address of the treasurer of my local party; we need the money more than they do.

At least one faction of the ruling Conservative party has long nourished an obsession with privatisation. The faction to which I refer is, of course, the No Turning Back group—or, as I heard a Conservative Member describe it, the No Coming Back group; no coming back after the next general election. The tragedy is that the supporters of that faction have risen to the highest levels in the present Government: I understand that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is an erstwhile supporter. Indeed, he seems to support it still, for he has brought to the Department not only his own obsession with privatisation but his No Turning Back fellow-traveller, the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who is now Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs.

What I know of the background of both men convinces me that the only rationale behind the Bill is that privatisation obsession. Why else should it not only unite Opposition Members—not always an easy task—but attract to the same anti-Bill coalition representatives of the trade unions, the Confederation of British Industry, the British Exporters Association and many chambers of commerce? No doubt some Conservative Members find that an even more unlikely coalition than the one that has formed in the Gulf over the past few weeks, but I can tell them that its members had been united by the Government's failure to provide any justification for the measures contained in the Bill.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I know that the hon. Gentleman did not intend to mislead the House when he included the CBI in his list of the Bill's opponents. However, according to a CBI brief which I have here, that organisation supports the Bill in principle. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has information that he has not shared with the rest of the House—or was he himself misled?

Mr. McAllion: Not only is this information that I have not shared with the House; it is information culled from the newspapers, which were reporting the CBI's opposition to the Bill long before it came to the House.

Conservative Members will always try to point to a consistency of purpose in the Government, which they will claim has led logically to this Bill. They will cite the launching of the "next steps" agencies initiative and to the Kemp report, which arose from that initiative and which recommended the privatisation. One hon. Member even described it as a bible for hon. Members. It has been asked —rightly—why Kemp's advice has been ignored. Kemp recommended that a state-owned company be created for a period of three to five years before privatisation.

Mr. Michael: Perhaps I may be of some assistance to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) who has referred to the CBI. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) appears to feel that the CBI was supportive of the principles of the Bill, but the CBI also called for

"a statement that the Government will continue to provide support for exporters on terms at least comparable to those afforded to their international competitors, including that support provided in 'the national interest'".

That goes to the heart of our criticisms of the Bill.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) is right: it is that kind of support which is completely missing. This explains the united coalition in this country against the Bill and the Government's proposals.

Kemp recommended that in the first stage there should be a state-owned company for at least three to five years before moving on to privatisation, and so far no convincing answer has come from the Government Benches to the questions raised by Opposition Members. We can, however, be certain that it has something to do with the Government's determination to rush the Bill through the House before the next election and before the people put them out of office and this Bill out of existence.

One of the key arguments has been the assertion that the requirements of the single market in 1992 will exclude state credit agencies from the insurance market. We are also told that increased competition within the single market requires a level playing field on which private sector insurance will not be placed at a disadvantage to public sector insurance. Both these arguments are no more than free market dogma, and an uninformed dogma at that.

First, there is no evidence whatsoever that the European Community is about to introduce, or even intends in the short to medium-term to introduce, legislation that would directly affect the operation of the ECGD. The Kemp report itself reached that conclusion. Hon. Members on the Government Benches have said that this development is inevitable, and one of them referred to a report in the *Financial Times;* but they are very selective when they refer to reports in the *Financial Times*. If they referred to a report on 10 January they would find that the Government line that private reinsurers would quickly step in to fill the gap was hotly disputed in the market place, where withdrawal of support was seen as unilateral export disarmament. That is what the *Financial Times* said recently, yet none of the hon. Members on the Government Benches have referred to that kind of argument.

In the absence of any substantial evidence to the contrary, the Government have a clear responsibility to explain why they are rushing this Bill through even before they know that there will be any such legislation or what form it may take. Those of us who are more cynical might suggest that not only is it expedient to rush the Bill through before a general election but that there is no better time than now to try and rush it through when the country's time and the attention is elsewhere and when the eyes of the media are diverted; there is no better time to slip through this unloved and shoddy measure in the hope that it will receive scant attention from anyone outside the House.

Let us take the question of the level playing field. Level for whom? Certainly not for British exporters who will be almost alone in having no kind of Government promotion for trade and exports compared with their European competitors and in having no public support for high-risk and politically difficult markets. Our exporters will thereby be weakened in comparison with exporters elsewhere in Europe. The Government justify this weakening of our exporters' position by reference to a level playing field and some imaginary state of capitalist perfection where we have a wholly free and unregulated market. It exists only in the minds of the No Turning Back group, but it is on the point of doing serious damage to our exports, to our balance of trade and to our national interest.

Another real cause for concern is the impact on ECGD itself and on its work force, who for more than 70 years have provided an invaluable service to exporters in this country. They have rightly been described as the world's most experienced credit insurers. They have given something like £250 billion in support to United Kingdom exporters, and they assist some 6,000 exporters every year. They have an insight into the problems facing exporters which is unrivalled and an expertise that underpins the export drives on which this country's future depends, and yet they are now to be subjected to break-up, privatisation and massive changes—changes unsolicited by them, about which they have not been consulted by Government and which I have no doubt they wholly oppose.

Earlier in the debate, an hon. Member said that this was a case of radicalism versus the status quo. There is radicalism and radicalism. There is the kind which is change for the worse and the kind which is change for the better. The radicalism advocated by hon. Members on the Government Benches is change for the worse, and that is why Opposition Members oppose the measure tonight. Perhaps in replying to the debate the Minister will tell us what support for the Bill exists among the experts in the ECGD themselves and how, if they had the vote, they would cast it at the end of the debate, for or against this particular measure.

What is certain is that the Government's proposals have met with almost universal hostility from those who represent the ECGD work force—the trade unions, who carried out a very successful lobby of the House today. They have raised a whole series of legitimate questions and worries with the Government to which they have so far had no satisfactory answers.

The Minister will know that the privatisation of the insurance services group will affect some 600 civil servants based not only in Cardiff but in the regional network. When it comes to redundancies, they want to know if at any stage there will be compulsory redundancies after the concern has been privatised. I understand that some in the

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regional network have already been threatened with redundancy, even before the Bill came before the House tonight. Will the Minister give a commitment to investigate these allegations of redundancy threats in the regional network and report at least to the Committee, if not to the whole House, the outcome of those investigations?

I also want to know what guarantees the Minister will give that privatisation now will not mean compulsory redundancies for the work force at some future date.

There is also the question of the terms and conditions of workers in a privatised concern. In opening the debate the Minister referred to the TUPE regulations of 1981 which require the offer by the purchaser of an overall employment package which is no worse than the civil service's employment package. I think he used the term "broadly comparable". What do "broadly comparable" and "no worse" mean? They are open to interpretation. I suggest to the Minister that the employers and the Government are in a better position to interpret what these words mean than are the employees.

Moreover, what is not open to interpretation and what has been confirmed by the Minister earlier is that pensions will be excluded from the TUPE regulations: workers who have contributed throughout their lives to an index-linked pension scheme, who have paid for them, are to have that agreed scheme stolen from them by Government diktat. The Minister says that this is fair. What guarantees has he given? The statement made by the Minister at the opening of the debate was less than clear. Does he guarantee that exactly the same pension rights will be available to the workers after privatisation as before privatisation; exactly the same kind of index-linked pension scheme?

Will the Minister confirm for the benefit of the House that the TUPE regulations cover only the position on day one of the transfer, and that on day two the new employer will be free to make whatever changes he wants to the terms and conditions of employment of the workers he has taken over?

Will the Minister further confirm that the transfer from the civil service to the new company will continue to be on a voluntary basis or say whether there will be a shift to compulsion? I understand that it is voluntary at present, but if insufficient people are convinced about the new company will the Government conscript civil servants at ECGD into the new private sector company that replaces it? If they do so, will he confirm that those who transfer will have exactly the same rights relative to their civil service status as they have at the moment? The Minister said that he would secure existing rights to redundancy and so on, but what about future rights? Will they be guaranteed? Will rights in the privatised concern be the same as they were in the public sector? I hope that the Minister addresses those points in his reply to the debate.

Will the Minister consider why the CBI and the British Exporters Association have lobbied against the measure? A privatised insurance group will not provide credit and insurance in high risk markets, particularly where there is political instability. The ECGD works under a break-even requirement on a yearly basis, but after privatisation the position will change and it will be required to make a profit. There will be a new balance between profit and risk taking, and risk taking will be the loser. There will be less risk taking after privatisation. Fewer exports will be assisted and fewer markets will be won. The national position of the United Kingdom will be weakened substantially.

Future options for export credits will be bleak. Either we will have a United Kingdom monopoly, most likely under trade indemnity, with higher premiums and reduced support, particularly in difficult markets, or there will be a foreign takeover, with British companies at a disadvantage, particularly in relation to companies from the home country of the foreign predator. That is a bleak prospect. We have already seen a reduction in support for trade fairs, the introduction of export charges and the withdrawal of cover from certain countries. In the case of a firm in my constituency recently, credit cover for Kenya was withdrawn. Now we have the creation of a so-called level playing field which will leave British exporters at a clear disadvantage.

In presenting the Bill, the Minister summed up by saying that its sole aim was to ensure the safeguarding of vital export services. It is precisely those services which would be put at risk by the Bill. For that incompetence and lack of understanding, the Government deserve to be put at risk. Their stupidity will play a significant part in ensuring that, when eventually they face the people, they will meet certain defeat.

7.12 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in this fascinating debate. I must follow the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) by declaring an interest. My interest is twofold—first, as director of a small to medium-sized manufacturing company which exports, and secondly, as a parliamentary adviser to a major firm of international contractors who have a distinct interest in the measure.

In principle, I have no great hang-ups about the part of the Bill relating to the privatisation of the insurance services group. From my personal experience, with my small company hat on, I have not had the greatest satisfaction in dealings with ECGD in the past. I have found it bureaucratic and slow. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) put his finger on it when he referred to decisions where we found that the cost of market development in overseas countries, especially where there was a high finance risk, coupled with the cost of the premium and the price that we could get for the product, made the business unattractive. Therefore, we found ourselves inclined to leave aside those parts of the world where finance was difficult or where we would have to undertake excessive market development, with nobody else to do it for us. As a consequence, our exporting activities were inhibited. We did not achieve anything like as much of the export activity that we would all have liked. We felt it safer to do it the other way.

I entreat my right hon. and hon. Friends, when addressing the question of how to divest Government of the operation after the passage of the Bill, to make certain that there is strong and free competition. That is very important. The attitude change which will come about as a consequence of the Bill could be of enormous help to small and medium-sized manufacturing companies such as I am involved with. We have found after previous privatisations that once the change in structure has been

made, there are new dimensions of thought. The establishment of clear competitiveness between two or more suppliers could bring out new dimensions of thinking on export credits guarantee. I should like to see that sphere opened up.

I should like to address the remainder of my remarks to the serious business of project exporting industry. My hon. Friend, in opening the debate, remarked upon the welcome that had been received from those involved in exporting. That is not the uninhibited joy which has been expressed to me. In an article in the *Financial Times* on 15 January 1991, the world trade editor, Peter Montagnon said:

"it has sparked deep worries among exporters that stiff terms for export credit insurance would make them uncompetitive on world markets."

The article underlines all the way through the representations that I have had. People have come back to me asking why, within the portfolio management system which is being put forward, we have got for project group business the most expensive premium rate structure of all the major exporting countries. I understand that this is ECGD's estimation of the position. I should like the Minister to confirm that to me in his reply, because it is fundamental that it should be appreciated.

My hon. Friend the Minister will surely realise that if that is the case, as I believe it is, it is putting United Kingdom exporters at a significant disadvantage and, indeed, diverting manufacturing activity away from this country. If it is felt that we do not provide the sort of assistance being provided by others, the major exporting companies in project business will look to overseas arrangements which will bypass this country. It worries me that that may happen.

France and Germany were mentioned by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin). The United Kingdom is pitching in the same marketplace, an incredibly competitive marketplace, in third-world countries. Both France and Germany charge lower premium rates. Significantly, in EC terms, neither France nor Germany publishes figures or accounts in the same way as we do. So, in effect, there is a hidden subsidy to the disadvantage of the United Kingdom. Looking at the drive towards Europeanisation, harmonisation and the political unity which is being urged upon us by France in particular, I cannot help but feel that such activity has to be ironed out of the system. We have to be careful that we do not go along with a situation in which France, Germany and others give more favourable rates, particularly as I gather that we are the most expensive.

If my hon. Friend's answer is a recognition of the premium position so far as the portfolio management system is concerned, perhaps he will tell the House why the Government are apparently deliberately withdrawing support for British exporters, in contrast with the very positive attitude of the French, and indeed the rest of the world, who are in there pitching for these third-world contracts that are so difficult to get? I read with great interest about the stone-walling that went on in another place a week ago by the Minister for Industry when he was challenged on this very point. I have no doubt that his brief said that he should not answer the question but I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would answer it tonight. One cannot help feeling that possibly the Government want to prevent United Kingdom project exporters from exporting to third-world countries. I cannot believe that that is the case, but it is the impression that one is left with all the time.

I want to refer to the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on 14 January. I must confess that I am glad that there has been a week's delay on this debate, which has given us time to digest things a bit. I note with interest that the Government are taking measures to press in international forums for other export credit agencies to charge more economic premium rates. The exporting industry, obviously, is not adverse to this. All it wants—we have heard this expression before—is a level playing field, and I can understand that. It does not want the Government to move at a pace which places the United Kingdom project exporting industry at a competitive disadvantage.

So, may we have some positive information from my hon. Friend in winding up tonight relating to the steps that he is taking? Which forums are we pressing? What is the timetable, the expected completion? The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) said that no one on the Government side had mentioned unilateral disarmament. He had the fortune to be slightly ahead of me rather than after me.

I have to remark that, while in another context the Government have not been strong advocates of unilateral disarmament, in the written answer of 14 January there is a clear statement that this is what we are about in this context. It is unilateral disarmament in that we are saying that we will seek a level playing field; we are unhappy with the premium rates that the other countries are charging so we will jack ours up to minimise the risk; we are sorry about the effect that it will have on all of them, but they will have to live with it. So can we have a little consistency by my party and my hon. Friends in terms of disarmament? I am a keen advocate of multilateral disarmament as far as arms are concerned, and I should like to be consistent.

Can we be told what timetable my hon. Friend envisages for achieving this level playing field, which will be welcomed by industry? Furthermore, what review mechanism does he have for assessing the consequences of this unilateralism in terms of business opportunity lost? If I am wrong and there is no business loss as a consequence, that is fine; that clears the ground; but we need some assurance that there is a mechanism for assessing it.

In his written answer my hon. Friend makes the point:

"It is not the ECGD's policy to disclose details of the amount of cover available for individual markets; exporters should contact the ECGD to ascertain the cover position in respect of contracts they are currently processing."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 359.]

That rang alarm bells with me. What speed of response does my hon. Friend expect when a project exporter with a possible bid in mind approaches ECGD to ascertain the possibility of cover? I am talking about the major project exporting business and it is an important point, since companies have to be able to work out their longer-term forward strategy and tendering is a long and expensive business. My hon. Friend will know that project exporting is difficult and tendering costs are high, while success rates are low. So each success has to bear the cost of all the failed bids.

Once a breakthrough has been achieved in a particular market, it is vital to be able to build on that success with follow-up orders. An over-restrictive application of

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portfolio management system principles could mean no cover for those follow-up orders precisely because of that initial success—an unsustainably wasteful way of doing business.

We are talking in terms of a tender time of, first, three to 12 months to identify an opportunity, pursue it and pre-qualify to tender. It is an expensive process; it means a lot of money and a lot of work up front. it probably has to be pursued against the strategy that I have mentioned in respect of a particular country as well. We have a tender period of three months, followed by the adjudication and subsequent negotiation process before contract award, which takes six to 12 months, or even more. So we are talking about a time span of at least 12 months, and probably 24 months or even more, before a contract comes to fruition.

So could a company which established when it started the process that ECGD cover was okay for the country and available, therefore, in principle, and even that the amount involved was in the ball park, be told when it moved into the adjudication phase or the final negotiation phase that there was nothing left in the kitty, that a major contract had been given the previous week to another company in another business relating to that country and therefore its effort, time and money had been wasted? That is very important because it affects the confidence with which people attack the process of achieving export business in the project field in third-world countries.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend how the Government see the portfolio being constructed and developed. It is said in the release that this is really a matter for the ECGD to look after, but I think it is helpful to know how it will be structured. As I understand it—I shall be grateful to be corrected if I am wrong—the portfolio is spread on the basis of 25 per cent. being defence-related, 25 per cent. being aid-associated, roughly 25 per cent. being Airbus-related—very heavy—and 25 per cent. being routine commercial projects. Airbus and defence look like being locked in, which leaves the aid and commercial sectors open to squeeze, and there was a mention of the Treasury possibly seeking to exercise influence towards a zero option in terms of funding.

Both those points have important connotations, in the short term for employment and in the longer term for United Kingdom national interests abroad in terms of influence, future business and the whole long-term approach to things.

So I would like from my hon. Friend an assurance that there is a continued commitment to exporting industry working in third-world arenas and not making the combination of premium increases and market capacity restrictions so severe that United Kingdom exporters will be unable to compete and, as a consequence, will achieve little or no business.

Lastly, a practical potential result of getting the parameters of the portfolio management system wrong will be to encourage United Kingdom based project importers to look even more towards co-operation with overseas partners. I have mentioned this before. These joint operations result in a dilution of the use of British manufacturers. As a British manufacturer potentially engaged in supplying overseas contracts, I feel very strongly about this. It would be possible to paint a scenario of penny wisdom and pound foolishness as we further risk our manufacturing base, engender unemployment and spend more on unemployment costs than we save on ECGD accounts. This is where the two budgets have to be brought together. Furthermore, we help our competitors, who may well be assisted to secure a foothold in markets which traditionally have been ours. The other point is the consequent effect on the balance of payments, which is important, and on employment.

I want an undertaking that the Government will closely scrutinise the operation of the portfolio management system and examine its trends and progress, that they will keep the door open to the United Kingdom project exporting industry so that it can be kept informed, and that they will respond to alarm signals with alacrity and flexibility when they are pointed out to them.

I should like to give a fair wind to the basic principles of the Bill. I have no hang-ups about its privatisation provisions, but there is tremendous responsibility on the Government in exercising their powers on the ECDG and the project exporting industry, which is not being offered to private ownership. It is a big responsibility.

7.30 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I shall be brief; if that gives a flicker of anxiety to some, it will bring relief and rejoicing to many more.

I wish to follow the point that was made by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), who is no longer present, in his plea for a long-term industrial strategy. Although his hopes are high, his prospects are rather limited. This matter has gone on for far too long. The Kemp report, which has been referred to almost ad nauseam, was issued at the end of a period of uncertainty about the Government's intentions for the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

The Kemp committee sat for a long time and thought carefully. Anyone who has had a quiet word with those who prepared the Kemp report will realise that their purpose was to come up with as low an order of madness as they could get away with to prevent the Government from coming up with as high an order of political madness as they could get away with if left to their own devices. That is not a satisfactory basis for the report.

After the report's proposals became known, there was a further period of uncertainty as we waited for the Government to clarify where they stood. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) properly and accurately said, there was a clear conflict of interest between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury.

That period of uncertainty gave rise to additional difficulties. For example, in an attempt to structure or influence the Government's proposals, the ECGD began to modify its behaviour. It would be interesting to know from how many countries the offer of export credit guarantee help was withdrawn during that period of internal debate on how to respond to the Kemp report. I fear that, during that period, a massive effort was made to contain current expenditure—the source of the Government's concern—to satisfy the Treasury. That process has already damaged the prospects of British exporters, in some cases irreversibly.

It is interesting to note that the proposals of the Kemp report—to privatise the short-term services division of the

ECGD as a state-owned holding company—were taken up by the Government of France, who operate their export credit guarantee assistance through a state-owned holding company. It is instructive that, for the purposes of joint marketing, that state-owned holding company has linked with French domestic credit insurance companies. Inspired and encouraged by the French Government, it is setting up export promotion agencies throughout eastern Europe to ensure a substantial place in those markets for French exporters.

That shows how those structures can be used to promote exports and an industrial strategy. It is terribly disappointing that in all the hints, guesses and statements of the Government, there has been no sign not only of any proposals but of any suggestion that such matters were a matter of concern or interest. That must be profoundly depressing for many exporters who, in increasingly difficult economic circumstances, are attempting to serve this country by broadening the base of our exports.

That uncertainty affects not only the past but the future, because, although we are aware of the structure and form of the Government's proposals, we are still uncertain about their content. For example, we have no clear idea of how they will attempt to ensure that the spread of risks covered by the ECGD will be reflected in the new arrangements made for the state agency.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): The hon. Gentleman mentioned what the French are doing for short-term credit. They do not have a good record on using state aid, supposedly to help industry. In that context, one thinks of the motor industry, and Renault in particular. To what extent is he aware of whether the state-owned companies that have been set up are profitable and are not subsidised by the Government? If they are being subsidised, surely that would be in breach of article 92 of the treaty of Rome?

Mr. Cousins: I suspect that the French Government have chosen to operate in that way to cast a fog of decent obscurity on that matter. Hon. Members may regard that as a sign of duplicity, but they may also regard it as a sign of ingenuity. If ingenuity promotes exports and increases their base, it may be no bad thing. The changes that the French Government have made in their export credit guarantee system in the past five years have been much influenced by the rules of the European Community and, in substantial measure, are an attempt formally to comply with them while retaining the ability to launch active industrial strategies of their own. There is no doubt about that, but I do not know why that accusation is made against the French. If one were a member of the French Government, one might take considerable pride from it.

The Government have thrown no light on how and by what means they will attempt to ensure that we shall have the same ability to take advantage of the spread of risk that we have now. They have not said how they will try to control the risk premiums that will be offered. They have thrown no light on whether the prospects of the network of the nine regional offices, which were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), will be secure under the new system.

The availability of a deeply embedded regional network of export credit guarantee offices for that small-scale but intense level of export activity is absolutely vital if smaller firms in the regions are to be drawn into the practice of active exporting. We expect the Minister, if not tonight, later in the Bill's progress, to give us his thoughts on how the network of agencies can remain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East was also right to cast doubt on whether the provisions for the transfer of undertakings in the Bill are meaningful. Those of us who are witnessing the true impact of changes in the national health service and the protection offered by the transfer of undertakings provisions are profoundly sceptical about the assurances provided in this Bill and whether they will prove meaningful.

Several hon. Members on both sides of the House have remarked that the Minister gave us no idea how he proposes to fill the black hole in his proposals. We are agreed, and the Government have been forced to concede, that even in their own proposals there remains a problem with the reinsurance of high political risks. The Government have said that, for three years, some means will be found to keep the reinsurance going. We have been given no details of that.

What will happen at the end of three years? Will there be a further period of transition and if so, on what basis? If not, how do the Government expect people to go over that cliff—because cliff it will be? The problem of political risk reinsurance will be an increasingly dominant feature of exporting to—one regrets—an increasing number of countries throughout the world. The Minister gave only a general assurance, which was not backed up by precise details. That is a matter of considerable regret.

There is a problem for the Government themselves. It would be a curious thing for the Government to privatise —if that is their word—the Export Credits Guarantee Department, lose control over the pattern and level of activities and be manoeuvred into passively picking up the tab for problems of political risk reinsurance. Again, the Government have provided no information to us and possibly no protection for themselves and their supposed aim of containing public expenditure.

The present position is disturbing. The economy is undoubtedly entering a period of recession. That point does not need to be laboured, because it is obvious to all. The insurance industry is less capable now than in the past of bearing some of the burdens which the Government propose that it should undertake. I draw the attention of the Minister to clause 3(3) of the Bill which contains the words:

> "The Secretary of State may not, in pursuance of such arrangements, enter into any transaction for the purpose of borrowing money but, subject to that, he is not precluded from entering into any transaction by reason of its involving borrowing."

The only conceivable meaning of that rather tortured language is that some of the Government's proposed arrangements in the new system will be extremely complex in insurance terms. Is this the right moment for the Government to hurl into the market many difficult and problematic transactions when it is clear that the British insurance industry is already shouldering a wide variety of difficulties and is much less robust than it has been for some time?

The Government's intention to bring export credit guarantees to the market is of little advantage to anyone if there is no market to be made. The Government must be somewhat cast down by the fact that many of those whom they hoped to interest in buying into the future of ECGD express much less interest now than previously. If the

[Mr. Cousins]

Government wish to offer ECGD for sale in the market, they owe it to themselves and the people who work in ECGD to ensure that there is a market to be made. At present, no such assurance can be given.

I do not wish to echo the point made by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) about the problems in the projects assistance provided by ECGD. The points that he made were sound. We do not know the exact balance—to some degree we must rely on guesswork—but Airbus and defence account for over 50 per cent. of the work of the projects section of ECGD. One could question whether that is an appropriate emphasis for a Government agency. It will continue to be a Government agency which is seriously interested in broadening the basis of British exports.

It would be unfortunate if, at the end of this tortured and difficult business—it has already lasted far too long and created far too much uncertainty and the results seem far from clear to the Government—we ended up in the disgraceful position that the Government not only had no industrial strategy to underpin their work in export credit guarantees but relied excessively on their own involvement in reinsurance of political risks in an entirely passive way. That may not represent good value for money. Neither should the main occupation of the remaining Government export credit guarantee activity be the promotion and securing of the British arms export trade.

7.47 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): It is always a pleasure to speak at the time when, as they say, the going gets tough and the tough go and have their dinner and leave those of us who are in thrall to the Whips to address the nation. *[Laughter.]* I do not know why that is a matter of amusement to my hon. Friends. It is a deeply serious point. We had hoped to have our dinner closer to 7 o'clock than 8 o'clock.

As it is fashionable to make declarations of interest, I should perhaps declare an interest as one of the few small business men in this place, and a one-time exporter. I have been had by almost every insurance company that exists. To that extent, I am distinctly susceptible to the quality of their service.

I have generally had a good experience in my dealings with ECGD. I have heard views to the contrary. One of my hon. Friends said that he found the service bureaucratic, but that was not my experience. It has always been straightforward, and its employees were knowledgeable and helpful. The acid test of the Bill and the proposal to denationalise ISG is that which my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) set out.

In an excellent speech—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who is looking slightly quizzical, did not hear it, because it was first class—my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) suggested that the acid test was extremely simple. One had to ask oneself—*[Interruption.]* Are we sure who my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge is? We should look him up. May I continue, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Please do.

Mr. Norris: We must ask whether the Bill helps or hinders exporters because, in all honesty, that is the acid test.

I do not know if I speak for all my hon. Friends but I suspect that I speak for the true intelligentsia, those of my hon. Friends who are present, when I say that I would not be in the slightest bit interested in a measure that was dogma purely for dogma's sake. The proposition in the Bill is an intensely practical response to a potential problem facing British industry. It saddens me that Opposition Members give a most extraordinary knee-jerk reaction whenever the word "denationalisation" or "privatisation" is mentioned, and in whatever context.

It may be a slight breach of confidentiality for me to tell the House about a conversation that I have every reason to believe took place between an Opposition home affairs spokesman on the privatisation of some prison services, a development to which I look forward. When I asked the Opposition's spokesman's attitude to that, I was given to understand—I think the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) will be able to put two and two together and make five—that the Opposition spokesman's response was, "I gather that we are against it, although in all honesty I am not terribly sure why." If Opposition Members ask themselves whether they are sure that they understand why the knee has jerked so comprehensively against the idea that we should transfer the operation of the ISG to professionals who understand the business, they will find that there is no good reason whatever.

Mr. Michael: As I am sure you would point out fairly soon, Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Gentleman strayed into home affairs matters. I think that he reversed the quotation, because, as I understand it, the response was given by the Minister. That reflects the confusion among Government Members about many policies. I invite the hon. Gentleman to consider the minutes of the Committee currently discussing the Criminal Justice Bill, because he will then see that the knee-jerk reactions occur among Back-Bench Conservative members of the Committee.

Mr. Norris: I did not want to say this, because it is terribly unfair to do so, but I was referring to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) who is not on the Committee. If I were an Opposition Member, I would question the right hon. Gentleman about the soundness of his opposition to privatisation. I have always given the right hon. Gentleman credit for considerable intelligence and I suspect that he, like many Opposition Members, privately knows that the idea that a service should be provided at arm's length by professionals, with proper supervision by the legislature, is inherently immensely sound. Conservative Members can be immensely proud of having promoted the idea so strongly during the past 10 years.

The Bill's purpose is to address the acid test of whether or not we can improve the service to exporters. I believe that we can, for concrete reasons. We should not still be debating the first one, which is whether the whole direction of the single market and single market legislation in Europe is towards the declaratory principle of article 92, which is, essentially, to outlaw state aid that distorts competition. It is absolutely clear that that is the nub of the single market. The whole point of the single market is to create conditions in which there are no artificial

boundaries to trade and competition among companies in all the European member countries. A cardinal principle of the single market is that Governments should not distort competition by artificial intervention.

I have heard the Opposition advance some most extraordinary arguments on that issue during today's debate. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), for whom I have great respect, uncharacteristically—there is no need for him to look round because I am referring to him and if he looks forward he will see that I can only be referring to him—advanced an extraordinary proposition. He suggested that what he describes as the complicity—his description, not mine—that underlines the French Government's approach to its subsidy of exports is a virtue, of which, on the quiet, we should approve. That is not only a dangerous proposition, but deeply questionable. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that the great spoils of this life should go to those who, in the single market, are most capable of undermining the whole purpose of the legislation. That strikes at the central purpose of the European Community.

I must say—it is directly relevant to the denationalisation of ISG—that, if there is occasional cynicism among Conservative Members about the direction in which the European Community is progressing, it is absolutely because over the past decade, the Government have shown a complete commitment to the implementation of the single market. We are further advanced towards the single market than any of our colleagues in Europe, and intend to see it completed. We wish to see it completed honestly and openly, because we believe that honesty and openness form the correct basis on which to conduct international trade.

It is utterly objectionable to suggest that we should adopt the attitude that, if we can evade the regulations, twist and turn them to our purpose and permit an underhand support of industry against the clear and wonderfully declaratory principles of our Community Ministers, whether French, Italian or whatever, it is desirable to do so.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: I was rather enjoying myself, but if I must, I shall give way.

Mr. Michael: It was clear that the hon. Gentleman was enjoying his own rhetoric, but he had left the subject of the Bill. Which pieces of legislation and regulation was he referring to?

Mr. Norris: I was so bound up in agreeing with the hon. Gentleman that that was wonderful rhetorical nonsense that I missed his question. Would he mind repeating it?

Mr. Michael: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman has to seek time to collect his thoughts, as have Ministers and other Back Benchers in the debate. Which piece of European regulation was he referring to?

Mr. Norris: I am sorry—I had given the hon. Gentleman credit for a more subtle intervention. I was simply referring to the principles of article 92. We have had a great discussion about the Kemp report as if it were some sort of bible—I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge described it as such—from which it was impossible to deviate. There is no difficulty in reading the Kemp report and assimulating it into the position that the Government have adopted. It is quite clear that it is not necessary as of today to denationalise ISG——

Mr. Michael *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I think that precisely my next point will satisfy the hon. Gentleman, so I hope that he will wait to hear it; if he is still not happy, he can then by all means intervene. As the *Financial Times* said in an article today, privatisation is much the cleanest approach to addressing the obvious question that will arise in future for French and other Governments in Europe—ensuring that there is a cast-iron mechanism to guarantee that state support to exports does not distort competition in contravention of what will then be established European legislation. That legislation will be so established because that is the whole drift of the European market, as underpinned by article 92.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman provides fresh confirmation that there is no such regulation. Perhaps he could now tell us how long ago article 92 was signed, as he seems to rely absolutely on it.

Mr. Norris: This is typical of the "angels on pinheads" nonsense that dogs the argument. In fact, the argument is extremely clear.

Mr. Janman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Norris: The whole drift of European single market legislation is clearly towards a competition environment and the absence of state subsidy. If we and other European Governments—with some honourable exceptions—were to continue with the present arrangements, there is no question that, in due course, we should fall foul of the very clear competition regulations that are the very essence of the single market.

I am given to understand that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth is a Front-Bench spokesman on these matters. That being the case, it really disturbs me that his party should be so confused as to the whole thrust of the European Community. That thrust is the creation of the single market. Indeed, I can think of few other virtues that the Community brings with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman)—a fellow member of the "Essex mafia"—has been extremely patient. I give way to him.

Mr. Janman: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way eventually. After all, he invited me to make interventions. I am grateful also that he is a colleague from the very fine county of Essex.

My hon. Friend is right when he says that it is surprising that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) seems not only to be gleefully unaware of the existence of article 92, but also not to understand that we are talking about a measure that is very important to the insurance industry. He seems to be unaware of the fact that there have already been three European directives laying down the criteria relating to competition in the provision of insurance services across national boundaries. Some of those criteria gel with this Bill, in the sense that an organisation funded by the state would not be able to compete across national boundaries.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend makes an entirely fair point. Indeed, such is his grasp of these events, that he confirms his position as political commissar of the Essex

[Mr. Norris]

Members. It is a pleasure to have him alongside me. However, bearing in mind the way in which he thanked me in the introduction to his intervention, in future I shall be more wary about giving way to him.

I want now to move on to what seems to me to be a very important practical consideration, to which, it may be, too little attention has so far have been paid. More than half of the business of ISG is conducted with fellow members of the European Community. My understanding of the whole principle of credit insurance is that it provides cover against default on payments. Understandably, in the case of ISG, we are talking about business with fairly low margins. As the risk is fairly assessable and sensible, there is clear virtue in establishing two principles.

The first is that, in this context, there is absolutely no need for artificial subsidy. It is very questionable that a taxpayer would get fair value for money were the Government, by way of a state agency, to subsidise credit insurance within the European Community. The second principle is fairly straightforward. Business with low margins ought to be conducted in very large volume throughout the community. So far as Trade Indemnity and potential bidders for this company are concerned, I have no axe to grind.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Shame.

Mr. Norris: Indeed, it is a great shame. My hon. Friend gets a lot more by way of retainer than the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) gets from his union.

As I have said, I have no axe whatever to grind. Subject to proper application of the rules on monopoly, my understanding is that we are not creating a monopoly.

What we shall have is a substantial professional organisation acting within the United Kingdom. It is clear that, by definition, we are entering a European market. The competition will be within Europe. Indeed, I can even see virtue in having in the United Kingdom a pretty substantial organisation capable of taking on the spread of risk and the volume of business that makes the underwriting of European community commercial risk justifiable. The idea that there is some sort of great monopoly scare in the prospect of tying the ISG to one of the existing credit insurers in the United Kingdom need not detain hon. Members, especially those on the Government side.

What is important is one of the other conditions attaching to the sale of ISG. This follows from a point that was discussed earlier. It would be utterly self-defeating if the bidder were to be a state-subsidised foreign company. Indeed, it would be intolerable if we were to have, for example, a part French-owned company actually determining the ability of British companies to export to France or, indeed, to any other country in the community. Clearly, under competition rules, the Secretary of State has already established that he will look very carefully at cases of acquisition by companies that are themselves part state-owned. I believe that that policy is entirely right and has widespread support on this side of the House. It is gratifying that the principle is embodied in this Bill.

One question remains, and it is one to which Opposition Members have quite rightly alluded. Other European countries will not necessarily change their regulations on the day on which this Bill becomes an Act. It is quite obvious that, so far as British industry is concerned, if the profitability that is demanded by the sale involves a sudden and short reduction in the facilities that are available to exporters, the British exporters will be at a disadvantage. That is the point at which we would allow dogma to overtake common sense and the interests of our business community. That being the case, I am delighted at the willingness of the Government to provide a three-year reinsurance facility through the Export Credits Guarantee Department to allow a new company, in effect, to balance its portfolio.

To the Government, I make a plea that echoes one that has already been voiced today. We should not be too rigid about the size or, more important, about the duration of the insurance provision underpinning the new company. It is vital that we move to an entirely commercial market as soon as possible and that we do not, in the interim, put British exporters at a significant disadvantage. The way to match those two things is to make sure that the reinsurance facility is not simply closed-ended for three years but is capable of extension should the need arise.

The *Financial Times* article that has been mentioned is very supportive of the move to denationalise the ECGD. It says that top-up may be necessary. I echo that sentiment, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take it on board. The acid test is not dogma; it is the practical interests of British industry.

Mr. Cousins: In the closing part of his speech the hon. Gentleman has been saying some extremely interesting things. That comment is not meant as a reflection on the earlier part of his speech. His remark that he does not think that the reinsurance facility should be closed-ended represents some criticism of the Government. Does he think that it should be closed-ended as to resources?

Mr. Norris: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has referred to that point. I made it for this simple reason. To the extent that it is necessary to move immediately to the commercial environment—that is to say, one in which the insured risk will show a profit—the new company will quite rightly wish to limit the facilities available, particularly as it will want to expand its book in certain markets as it develops experience. During that time, the provision of a reinsurance facility, effectively continually funded by ECGD, is entirely proper.

At the moment, the proposition is that that should be limited in operation and in time. My plea to the Under-Secretary—to which, were he not in avid discussions with practically every other hon. Member in the House, he would no doubt be sympathetic—is that that facility should be open-ended in terms of both scope and time. I do not think that the Under-Secretary heard me, but I shall leave it on the record for him to read in his bath tomorrow morning.

I shall now say something about projects group business. So far today, there has been no mention of the fact that the ECGD has a cash deficit with the consolidated fund of £2·5 billion, and I am given to understand that there are further claims of another £2·5 billion for the next few years. That puts me in mind of two cardinal principles. One was mentioned by my right hon. Friend—I am sorry, my hon. Friend—the Minister for Trade. I am sure that I merely anticipate the inevitable. From his commercial experience, he will know of that old golfing metaphor—one drives for show and putts for

dough. In other words, turnover is jolly useful, but nobody made a profit of turnover. One must show a profit on turnover.

In the present environment, I doubt whether the taxpayer can be happy that, so far, we have spent £5,000 million making goods in Britain and then giving them to other people at, essentially, £5,000 million less than we ought to have given them. I am a simple person, as no doubt my speech will confirm, but the introduction of the portfolio management system is a welcome development, as it will introduce some management control in a part of business that is otherwise in danger of getting out of hand.

It is right to have a system for pricing and controlling ECGD expenditure in relation to its support for project exports on medium and long-term credit, because that will allow the national interest reasons for supporting project exports. There is a good national interest reason, on occasion, properly to be weighed against the risk to the ECGD and the taxpayer that income from premiums and the ECGD reserves will not cover the underwriting losses that the ECGD may make on this type of insurance. Incidentally, it will ensure that the ECGD will continue to support United Kingdom capital and project goods exports, but at a greatly reduced cost to the taxpayer. That is an important criterion.

I am advised that it will also ensure that premium rates charged by the project group match the degree of risk more closely, which means that rates for high risk markets may rise. I face that prospect with equanimity, because rates in the lower risk markets will fall, and that must be good news.

If we do not press for other export credit agencies to charge more economic premium rates—something to which I hope the Government will pay attention—it will be pointless to be in a virtuous or a vicious circle by which everybody is subsidising business to pass goods around the world at prices that are inherently unrealistic.

The best way of all in which the Government could assist exporters is by a simple mechanism that would have the virtue not only of making exports more attractive, but of making them easier to fund—that is, to reduce the domestic interest rate. That might even drive down the value of the pound and make imports dearer. That is how I see it, as a simple soul, but I am told that this is a highly unsophisticated analysis, so I leave it on the table. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry will see the wisdom of that policy, so that those of us in the small business section will have a tiny modicum of relief.

This is a forward-looking Bill, which shows that Britain is determined to be the leader in the single market. It is in stark contrast to the policies of some of our European counterparts but, more particularly, it is in stark contrast to the views of the Opposition. We intend to make the single market work for the benefit of all European citizens. I have no hesitation in commending the Bill to the House.

8.14 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I have no specific interest to declare about any company with which I am involved, but I declare a general interest in the well-being of the whole British manufacturing industry, for which the services that we are discussing should be continued. I agree with the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). There is a huge divide between Opposition Members, who believe that the ECGD, in all its activities, has an important and at times vital role to play in the support of British manufacturing, and Conservative Members who, in their blind pursuit of the quixotic folly of the single market, do not mind what damage they inflict on British manufacturing, so long as they can say that they are unilaterally conducting this policy of industrial disarmament.

It is no good saying, as the hon. Member for Epping Forest said, that the French, the Germans and the Japanese have their own ways of promoting their exports—in the latter case, for many years and perhaps even now, they prevented imports as well—but we shall have none of that, so translucent is our purity, so overriding is our determination, whatever the cost to British consumers and producers, to implement the single market with all that that involves.

Governments of both parties do silly things from time to time, but I should have thought that this silly, tatty, messy Bill would have been dropped following the change in regime a little while ago. Unfortunately, we have had a continuation of policy under three Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry. The privatisation measures in the Bill result not just from silly dogma but from the determination of the Treasury, which now emerges triumphant from the long guerrilla campaign that it has waged against an outstanding Department of Government. As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have done, I pay tribute to the competence and professionalism of those in the ECGD with whom I have had occasion to work.

It is no argument—indeed, it is a slight—for Conservative Members to say that, by privatising this service, we shall put it in the hands of the professionals. It is in the hands of the professionals. It is in the hands of a group of people who have done the job for many years and who have always had as an overriding objective, the promotion of British exports and the interests of British manufacturing industry.

Will the Under-Secretary look into a case for me? It concerns GEC-Plessey Telecommunications in my constituency, which has secured a most important contract with the Government of Kenya for £23 million-worth of exports of telecommunications equipment. I understand from the group's director that cover for Kenya has been removed. This affects the project group, which is based here in London. Will the Minister reconsider that decision and recognise that, after we lost many jobs in Coventry last year in this sector, we do not want unnecessarily to face the same problem this year?

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Has GEC considered taking the risk on its own books?

Mr. Robinson: That is not the issue today. Manufacturing companies are able to avail themselves of services which have been in place for many years; they have done a good job by British industry. In this debate we are discussing the dismantling of one of those services and the prospective rundown of other services. We are dealing today not just with the insurance services group, which is the first step. Who believes that the Treasury does not have its sights relentlessly set on project support? Clearly it must do so, and that is what the long-term argument is about. It is about efforts by the Treasury to get out of this whole

[Mr. Robinson]

area of support for British manufacturing. This issue is not whether the company should take on this role. The issue today is why the Government are not doing so.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: In other words, the hon. Gentleman is saying that the whole commercial insurance experience in ECGD, which he rightly says has experts working for it and which has been in business for a long time, has come to the conclusion that this is a risk which can no longer be underwritten. In effect, the hon. Gentleman is saying that, despite the fact that they will not be able to pay the money, GEC should be able to export this, with all the consequences for jobs in his constituency and elsewhere in the country, and that the taxpayer should pay for it. Why should not the taxpayer just give the money straight to GEC?

Mr. Robinson: I am not saying that at all. There is always a question of judgment in these matters. That must be clear even to the hon. Gentleman In this life, things are not black or white. If the hon. Gentleman really believes that, he cannot have been in the House long. There is a difference in the Government. I am sure that the pressure here, as always, is coming from the Treasury, which takes an extremely hard line. The Treasury's sole concern is always to limit Government expenditure, while the Department of Trade and Industry is pushing the manufacturers' case and the case of British industry, and I believe that it would be supported in that attitude by the project group. I ask the Department and the Minister of State to take a particularly close look at this aspect.

It would be strange indeed to see such a Bill as this being pushed through in any other country. At a time when we were withdrawing subsidies right across British manufacturing industry, France, Italy, Germany and Japan were continuing in various ways to back their industries. I do not condone what they have done, and I do not particularly say that it is wrong.

When the Government say that they will have none of that and that all we are interested in is the 1992 position, one must ask whether they have ever been in manufacturing industry. Do they not know what the score is when one gets into contract negotiation? Do they not realise how important it is in many big projects, and indeed within and outside Europe, to have the Government with and behind one's industry?

All we are asking for on behalf of British manufacturing industry is a level playing field, but we cannot level the playing field at our end and fall off the edge at the other end. That makes no sense to anyone in British manufactory industry. We want a level playing field and on that basis we can compete with anybody, but there have to be reciprocal measures and actions for achieving that. We cannot have the British Government seeking to prejudice the interests of British industry.

This Bill is ill thought out. We do not know who will buy this proposal. It would be absurd to sell it to the Dutch national company, and equally absurd to create a monopoly by selling it to Trade Indemnity in the United Kingdom. I do not believe that Sun Alliance could possibly undertake to do anything like the job on the scale and on the terms that we need.

We need from the Government a total rethink of this mess to avoid getting themselves into a position in which they have no buyer or the cover suddenly dries up. Even Conservative Members have said that there must be an open-ended guarantee for the supply of that reinsurance finance—an unconditional guarantee in terms both of the volume and of the conditions on which it is available. What sort of incoherent, self-contradictory nonsense is that?

There is only one thing to do today. The most appropriate course is for the Government to withdraw the legislation, to go back to proper funding and support for ECGD as a separate independent corporation, funded by but separate from Government, in the way the French and others operate. But we cannot have this continued penalisation of British interests in the interests of a greater, quixotic monument which the Government are so anxious to build on the ruins of British industry which they are creating.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On behalf of a number of my colleagues, I make a formal request that the Government consider making a statement at 10 o'clock, or as soon as is convenient thereafter, about the attack on Tel Aviv tonight, about the tragic loss of another Tornado, and about the oilwells ablaze—a matter that was raised at 3.30 pm. Could that request be conveyed to the House authorities?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I have had no request for a statement, but I am sure that the Treasury Bench has heard the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

8.26 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Having heard the opening remarks by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) who led for Labour this afternoon, and the comments of her hon. Friends, particularly the hon. Members for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), I make the point that ideologically they are just as committed to nationalisation and state control as I am committed to and believe in precisely the opposite approach.

I make no apology for the fact that I am a totally unrepentant denationaliser. My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who has gone to his well-earned supper, made a most delightful speech of serious content which was delivered in a way that only he could do. But throughout his speech he also used the word "denationalisation", and rightly so. I am not quite sure why we stopped using that word in favour of the word "privatisation", which seems to have all sorts of connotations in the public mind which confuse and diminish public support for the concept that industrial and commercial undertakings are better run and managed in the private sector than in the public sector. As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said earlier—and it was not a criticism of this place or of hon. Members but a statement of simple fact—this House, which contains very able hon. Members but largely the wrong people, is the wrong venue to dabble in the day-to-day affairs of commerce and industry.

We who are honoured to be here are primarily the guardians of the public interests. I believe that we can best do that if we are at arm's length from the various enterprises and if we ensure that they work within a

framework of minimum regulation to ensure and protect the public interest. That is our true role rather than the running of trade and industry.

I welcome the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill as yet another step in denationalisation, even if the Government in their wisdom have felt able to float the Insurance Services Group as part of the present Export Credits Guarantee Department. If the Government feel at this stage that the wider public interest is best served by retaining public control of what is currently called the project group based in London, then for the moment I am content.

Who would buy the massive losses and predicted losses that were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest? Judging by the fact that ECGD may not support exports to the Community and that those exports are currently about half the total activities, it seems to me that a review of its format is called for, and certainly it is right that it should become two separate enterprises. If ECGD covers short-term credit, surely it fits the normality of private insurance cover rather than the involvement of the state and the Exchequer. Its activities at present are not loss-making, so I presume that it has nothing to fear from the normal commercial pressures of competition.

I do not like to hear of the deficit on the business that will stay in the public sector, but clearly it is the kind of business that could not be won by exporters without it. If its continued funding is in the public interest, at least for the time being, until we see how Europe and the rest of the world moves, I am content that that part stays in the public sector.

All of us, as was said earlier, have heard of projects lost to other countries because the financial arrangements were not as good as those on offer by our competitors. I hope that, when my hon. Friend the Minister replies, he will say something about that. My instinct is that insurance services, like so many other areas of commercial endeavour, are likely to respond much more readily and effectively in the private sector under the increasing European rules. Unless denationalised, my understanding is that insurance services would be functioning, as my hon. Friend said when he opened the debate, with one arm tied behind their backs. We must anticipate 1992 and make the necessary changes.

This is not the only example of where in the European context we must get out of the public and into the private sector soon. Hon. Members will recall that last week the British Technology Group had an excellent display in the Upper Lobby. That organisation too is finding itself constrained and is worried about the new format in Europe after 1992. I hope that it will not be long before we debate on the Floor of the House the setting free of that enterprise.

I have been a member of the Committee considering one other denationalisation Bill, when the one legitimate concern expressed by hon. Members on both sides, not just the trade union sponsored Members, was for the protection of the staff involved. I understand that clear undertakings have been given that transfer to the privatised company will be voluntary and that the staff who transfer will be given terms and conditions at least as good as those that they currently enjoy. I also understand that, where that is not possible, those terms and conditions that cannot be transferred will be replicated. I do not believe that the Government could be clearer than that, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that that is the Government's intention.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I do not think that what the hon. Gentleman says is true. The staff terms and conditions will not be protected—especially the pensions. Perhaps, through the hon. Gentleman, I can ask the Minister to confirm that. However, I think that there is a serious question about it.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The reading that I undertook before the debate suggests that that is the case, but if that is not so, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will clear that up when he replies.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said that, if rates were not competitive, British industry would go elsewhere to other companies in the United Kingdom or to finance and insurance companies in Europe. So they should. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) has experience of industry and I am sure that he would agree that industry jolly well should go where it can get the best deal. What I hope will come out of the Bill is that there will be one other means whereby British manufacturing companies can find a British company that will give them the best deal in Europe. But it is no part of the Government's role to set a scene that virtually makes that impossible, driving companies abroad for their insurance cover, which is what would happen if we did not set up a framework in the United Kingdom to ensure a competitive scene.

If the short-term business underwritten by insurance services is no different from much of business currently being dealt with by private sector insurers, and if the project group is to be allowed to continue with Government funding, to handle under the state umbrella those risks that cannot be covered by or are unacceptable in the private sector, we are approaching the matter in the right way, denationalising that which can be denationalised and retaining in the public sector that which cannot.

This is an enabling measure. No date is set for any flotation. I echo the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). I support the Bill but I express some caution. We should not move at a pace which puts any United Kingdom company at a disadvantage compared with any European competitors.

8.35 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I speak tonight as the Member for Cardiff, West, not in my capacity as an Opposition spokesman on energy. The ECGD insurance services group is located in the adjoining constituency of Cardiff, Central with the computer centre in the other adjoining constituency of Cardiff, North. Many of my constituents are among the 800 or so people who work for ECGD in the Cardiff area. Therefore, I feel particularly strong empathy with the battle against this rash, hurried and premature measure.

All hon. Members seem to be agreed tonight that, if the measure is prompted by free market dogma, it is wrong, and if our opposition to it is based on Stalinist dogma, that is also wrong. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have managed to skate for at least five minutes on the thin ice in the belief that dogma is wrong and common sense is

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

right. I shall try to examine whether the measure is activated by dogma or whether it has a backbone of rationality and common sense.

The Bill has two main purposes. One is to continue with the existing work of the ECGD, providing the Secretary of State with the powers to do that, and the second is to facilitate the privatisation of the insurance business of the ECGD. I am not a great fan of Anglo-Saxon proverbs, but that could be called trying to have one's cake and burn it.

The Bill seems to have been prompted not so much by the needs of industry, the EC or 1992, but simply by the weirdo views of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the previous Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who, to use a football field analogy, believed that one should equalise before the other team scored. It is true that some day the EC, in particular, via Sir Leon Brittan, a former Member of the House and the vice-president of the EC in charge of competition matters, might bring in a proposal which will then have to be negotiated with the 12 Governments to produce a level playing field in the area of export credit insurance free of subsidy, or at least the possibility of subsidy implied by the taxpayer backing for it, to cover internal trade after 1992.

There is no sign of this on the horizon yet. No one is hurrying except this Government. That causes us to ask why it was necessary for the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury to leap in with the measure when he did, in advance of all the other countries which had not made any moves in the same direction. Is that the best way to play the Euro game? That is the question we must ask ourselves when we apply the test of dogma or common sense to this measure.

Mr. Janman: I remind the hon. Member that his own party often criticises us, albeit quite wrongly, for dragging our feet in the European Community, particularly in relation to implementing directives from the Community about the single market. The hon. Member will be aware that Brussels is taking a very keen look at the subsidies that are implicit in the way in which countries in the Community handle their export credit policies. Surely it is absolutely right and proper that this Government should take a lead in what, inevitably, everyone else will have to follow.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Member has touched on the correct point, but he is interpreting it quite wrongly. How is the Euro game best played in the interests of United Kingdom plc? That is what we are asking. That is something this measure plainly does not do. All the justifications that have been given by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) who has now gone to his much delayed and very much deserved dinner, the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), by way of intervention, simply display the fact that they do not understand how legislation is shaped at the European level in an attempt to produce, post-1992, the much desired level playing field.

Let me tell the House what actually happens when the European Community shapes legislation to bring in the level playing field. The European Community is attempting to blend 12 entirely different systems—perhaps it is not as many as that; the Benelux countries, Spain and Portugal may have similar systems. Nevertheless, it is trying to blend at least half a dozen entirely different systems. This does not mean that, on day one of 1992, everything that existed before that could possibly constitute an intervention in the free passage of goods, services and labour across community frontiers must be abolished.

That is not the way the European Community operates; it never does things like that. It will recognise that, in Britain, we have a system which has existed for 70-odd years, and 90 years in domestic credit through trade indemnity. France has a different system; Germany has a different system again, and so on. How can all these systems be blended into a sensible compromise that does not favour any one country? If the Government are really interested in the well-being of this country, the last thing they will do is lay all their best cards on the table before any of the other countries in the Community have started to show any of their bargaining chips. Before the other countries in the Community even start to mould the legislation into the shape that suits them best, we have already shown our best hand.

In effect, the Government are saying that United Kingdom plc can swim in shark-infested waters without any water wings or assistance or any swimming lessons at all. If it cannot swim, then it probably does not deserve to be in business anyway. That is a reasonable summary of the attitude of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury. He is effectively saying, "If I am not good enough to be Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, then British industry is not good enough to be looked after by me. It can either sink or swim, and if it cannot swim, it is probably a good thing it is out of the water instead of cluttering it up for everyone else."

It is the same sort of attitude that we saw in the steel industry in 1980 when the Davignon crisis plan came in. Britain dived in straight away before any of the other countries. When Davignon said that we must lose 25 per cent. of our steel industry we closed plants even before we started bargaining. Then the other European Community countries caught up very slowly—the French Government did so in 1985; the Germans started in 1987 and the Italians waited until 1989. But we did it in 1980—no problem. This Government thought it was a good idea to apply the cold shower treatment and get rid of the so called weaker brethren, remove the fat and the surplus.

That is what we mean by dogma. That is what we mean by not adopting a common sense and rational attitude. It is the Government's job to look after United Kingdom plc. It is the French Government's job to look after France plc and the German Government's job to look after Germany plc. If this Government does not look after United Kingdom plc then the French Government certainly will not do so. I am afraid that that is the nature of the failure of the British political establishment in this House and in particular in the Government party to understand how to play the Euro game in order to give United Kingdom plc a reasonable chance of competing on fair and equal terms in 1992. That is one of the reasons why we have a trade deficit of extraordinary proportions with our fellow trading partners in the European Community which bodes ill indeed for the onset in 11 months' time of the European single market.

Tonight we are looking at two aspects of the Export Credit Guarantees Department. The first is projects, which is admittedly a subsidy racket. There are no two ways

about that and we all agree that this is so. It is a very difficult position to get out of and the Government have accepted that by not attempting to privatise the projects group—the long-term credit insurance for defence equipment, power stations, chemical plants and all the usual stuff that we have sold abroad to third-world countries and eastern Europe over the years. It is a bit of a racket. There is very heavy and competitive subsidisation of the export terms. The Government do not have a solution to that question and I do not have one either. I accept that it is a racket. Multilateral disarmament must take place over the years which may affect the work of the projects group, but the Government accept that they do not know how to get around the problem.

Basically, this Bill applies to the unsubsidised part. It is a mutual reinsurance facility in many ways which has been in existence in respect of the OECD and the EC level export credit insurances, and it is unsubsidised. It involves a facility that is available from the taxpayer, but it is obliged to abide by the principle that it must not be subsidised. It must wash its own face, taking good years with bad. It is very similar to trade indemnity in this country through the backing of the big insurance companies.

On the projects side, we are not talking about the removal of subsidy. I do not know whether the EC wants to go in for the kind of penny-in-the-slot, laissez-faire philosophising that we have heard from many of the Back Benchers who have supported this matter tonight. It is not a matter of saying that we should eliminate subsidies because that is the basic principle of the Community; it is merely a question of whether something should be done in the public sector or the private sector.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South said that he preferred the word "denationalisation" to the word "privatisation". Tonight we are looking at all the options whereby we can denationalise something without privatising it. In other words, are there any methods by which one can bring in private capital so that ownership is not transferred to the private sector but the public sector borrowing requirement problem is removed? In other words, one has a state-owned plc, either with or without private capital. These are all matters of detail which could act as forms of export credit which are guaranteed to work without finding a bidder who will actually purchase the company and place it in the private sector.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It is not just the effect on the public sector borrowing requirement or arguments about 51 per cent. or 49 per cent. It is the fact that, when politicians, whether in this place or at local level, have control of something, they feel that they have to meddle. They are the wrong people to meddle. It should be left to those who are running the business.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman offers one of the best examples of penny-in-the-slot, laissez-faire theorising that I have ever heard. If that is not dogma, I do not know what is. The hon. Gentleman suggests that the ECGD cannot make sensible commercial decisions while in the public sector. Only among the free traders on the Back Benches and Front Benches of the modern Conservative party is there to be found dogmatic assertions of that kind without any facts to back them up. That allegation has never been made during ECGD's 70 years of existence, and the ISG has never needed a subsidy.

It is hoped that the group will be kept together when it is sold to a private purchaser. However, one must remember the management pyramid, chain of command and age spread that currently exists in the ISG. Many of those currently responsible for taking the key decisions that can equally well be effected in both the public and private sector are people in their forties, who may have worked in the civil service for 25 years, first in London and then in Cardiff, and who will have a large pension entitlement.

If one asks someone who has spent all their working life in the ECGD, man and boy, woman and girl, whether they want to transfer to Trade Indemnity, Sun Alliance, Barclays, Nederlandsche Credietverzeuring Maatschappij, or whoever purchases it, or would prefer to spend the next 10 years still employed in the civil service or take early retirement, a large proportion will prefer to move to another Department rather than take their chances with a private employer. At 47 years of age, or whatever, their pension entitlement is important to them.

That stark choice will confront many people in senior management positions in the ECGD. The pension entitlement which has accumulated for many of them is bound to be a major factor in deciding whether to join the private purchasers' own pension scheme and sacrifice a civil service pension, or to take a job elsewhere in the service.

I take a close interest in anything affecting the ISG's headquarters in Cathays park in Cardiff, not least because I worked as a civil servant in the same building for five years and was involved in the negotiations that brought the group to Cardiff in 1975-76, when I was the industrial development officer for south Glamorgan. In the mid-1970s, we made a major attempt to attract to Cardiff Government Departments that were moving out of London. Companies house moved in 1974, and the business statistics office moved to Newport in 1975. The ECGD itself moved to Cardiff in 1976. In the private sector, the Automobile Association's insurance division moved from Basingstoke, and the Chemical bank of New York relocated to Cardiff in 1981. Over a five-year period, a critical mass was achieved in financial services in the Cardiff area, so that it now offers a choice of jobs in both the public and private sector that would be attractive to existing ISG employees.

When the group is privatised, its main building will be in breach of its covenant with the Marquis of Bute, which specifies that all buildings in Cathays park must remain in public sector use as universities, local offices, Government Departments, and so on. On privatisation, the group will be without a home. One can understand the concern felt by the ISG's 750 employees, because the Government are placing their jobs on the block by transferring the group to a new owner and leaving it without a headquarters. I understand that the Marquis of Bute's legatees have promised to be reasonable and will not insist from day one of privatisation that the group will have to move out of Cathays park, but then it will be down to rather one-sided negotiation with Cardiff property developers if the company is to find a new home. If the negotiations turn sticky, there may be cause to worry about the future employment of those concerned, who may be forced to move from the area that has been their home since 1976.

I appeal to the Government to be as non-dogmatic as it is within their philosophical capabilities to be. They may find good reason for abandoning the Bill. They do not

[Mr. Morgan]

have to stick to it for the sake of the memory of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, never mind scoring brownie points with the Adam Smith Institute. Instead, they should look after their 750 civil servants in Cardiff, and look after UK plc.

8.56 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I shall be as brief as possible, so that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) may have an opportunity to contribute to the debate. I confess that I am standing here tonight partly because of the arm-twisting of my Whip a few hours ago, when he approached me about speaking in this debate.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) is on firmer ground when he asks my hon. Friend the Minister to address the practical questions and the difficulties that must be overcome in physically moving the group out of its existing offices in Cardiff and transferring the business to a new owner, than when he spoke of Labour's interventionist, nationalising philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Bill is a small but precise step forward in the programme of rolling back state control—and a very welcome step it is. I hope that it gives a clear message to both Labour and the British people—that, even though there has been a change of leadership in our party, there has been no diminution or watering down of our clear intention to continue implementing the Conservative principle of denationalisation for the future health of our people and economy.

Tonight, we have heard a lot about the ECGD's deficit, although I believe that most of it is within the projects group and not the ISG. However, I wish to dwell upon ISG and its denationalisation. Within the European Community, it is illegal to subsidise exports from one member state to another. Given that 50 per cent. of the ISG's work is within the Community, and that it is part of an organisation which is clearly used to subsidise exports, it is quite evident that action has to be taken. The keenest and most appropriate method is to transfer the ISG into the private sector, which is what the Bill seeks to do. It also seeks to improve the cost-effectiveness of the projects group, as some of my hon. Friends have mentioned.

Within the next few years, the European insurance marketplace will be in a considerable state of flux, and the Bill gives the ISG the commercial flexibility required to operate within that marketplace. Bureaucratic sloth, which is inevitable in any nationalised operation, will be replaced by competitiveness and commercial awareness. Denationalisation of ISG will inevitably give that edge to its entire operation. The Bill carries out the fundamental recommendations of the Kemp report, which is an objective and non-doctrinaire assessment of the requirements.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) said, denationalisation is a better way to describe what we are doing than privatisation, and I shall summarise the main reasons why I think that it is important for us to proceed with it.

There will be increased competition in the credit insurance marketplace within the European Community. The marketplace will be framed by national law and by directives from the European Commission, which will preclude state-subsidised or state-owned companies from having access to markets in other member states. Therefore, the first reason is that the commercial environment is changing, due to our membership of the European Community and to the single market, and the Bill reflects that changing environment and will allow ISG to compete within it.

I must tell the hon. Member for Cardiff, West that, although there may be practical problems because of the changes, it is far better to have those problems than to lose large numbers of jobs in Cardiff because the ISG in its present state would not be able to gain access to the European marketplace as a result of those changes.

A private company, rather than a publicly owned body, will be able to refine its product range, and will have more commercial freedom. For example, it may want to combine domestic and export credit insurance, without subsidy from the taxpayer. In other words, the products that it offers the marketplace within which it will have to operate will be far more commercially competitive.

ISG will need to be non-subsidised if it is to be effective within the European Community, and the services that it offers must be competitive. The continuation of state subsidy would hamper ISG in the modern European marketplace. Increasingly, multinationals will want one-stop shopping when buying insurance in the European Community, and the Bill will enable the ISG to diversify the services that it offers multinational operators within the Community. The ISG will not be able to do that if this change is not made.

Continual state backing is probably illegal, as I said earlier in an intervention during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), whether it is overt state control, as in Britain today, or the more covert arrangements developed in France, which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) mentioned. Whether they are overt now, or covert during the next few years, such arrangements are illegal under article 92 of the treaty of Rome. Given the Opposition's uproar when there was that little controversy last year about the sale of Rover—the Opposition were very annoyed then about the use of injudicious state subsidy in Britain in the motor industry—it is interesting that Opposition Members now defend French actions in this part of the insurance industry.

Another good reason for denationalising ISG is that it is absolutely right to free it from the interference of politicians and civil servants. Given his experience in the civil service and the world at large, I am surprised that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West has not observed that there is an overwhelming temptation for bureaucrats, civil servants and politicians to meddle when they have the opportunity. The best way to prevent that is to ensure that the service is offered by the commercial world, under private ownership.

I believe that the Bill will enable the ISG to provide a better service for exporters, especially small firms. I welcome the mechanism whereby the ISG will be transferred to the private sector—competitive tender—and also the criteria to be applied to that mechanism. Let me say in conclusion—for I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) wishes to speak—that the Bill is good for the ISG; good for the employees, as it will be far more likely to guarantee employment than the present system; good for exporters;

and good for the taxpayer. It is, however, bad for the Labour party, which is still wedded to the philosophies of the interventionist 1960s and 1970s, which tonight's debate has exposed for what they are.

9.5 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The repetition by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) of the word "good" does not make good a bad piece of legislation.

This has been an interesting debate, in which a number of constructive speeches from both sides of the House have exposed the weakness of the Government's case. The Opposition have maintained from the outset that the Bill is dogmatic and pointless. It will weaken the Government's support for private enterprise and do yet more damage to the export trade that is so important to Britain's economic future. Today's debate has shown that we are right. The Minister should listen to the voices of his hon. Friends as well as those of Opposition Members, and withdraw the Bill.

Our plea is simple—protect exports. The Cardiff and ISG operations are not merely a concentration of staff —which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) and I value, because we see it operating in our city and our constituencies, and especially in the constituency of the Trappist hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist). This is a concentration of staff with expertise, whose work has won respect and who have given tremendous support to manufacturers throughout the United Kingdom.

I accuse the Government of a lack of pride in the achievements of an important public enterprise—a lack of pride in the contribution made by an arm of Government in helping the private sector, and small businesses in particular. The Government, indeed, show a certain lack of patriotism, allied to the lack of understanding of Europe that is patent in their approach.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised when we consider where the Bill started its life. Its birthplace was the Department of Trade and Industry, where the inner policy-making sanctums were presided over by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). South Wales Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West and myself—were appalled when the decision leaked out in a written answer. Some of us went to see the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, and asked him why he was taking such action. He replied, "Well, we may be forced to do it anyway." We asked, "What action by the European Commission forces the panic?" The response was a toss of the head; we received no answer.

We pointed out that, in his previous post at the Department of the Environment, the right hon. Gentleman had had a reputation for refusing to listen to Europe—not only in regard to law and regulations: he had had to be dragged to the door of the European Court before showing the slightest twitch of interest or intention in relation to environmental and water industry issues, let alone action. We received no answer that day to our question, and have received no answer since. No evidence has been produced to support the Government's decision. It is an example of appalling misjudgment to promote a measure to undermine Britain's export drive, and an example of even worse judgment to press on when the case has been blown apart and everyone is against it.

The debate has produced a number of red herrings—not least from the hon. Member for Thurrock, who suggested that the ISG would be unable to compete in the European marketplace. It would be able to do so if the Government showed the necessary flexibility, and considered the options recommended in the Kemp report instead of being mesmerised by their own single solution. One of the problems that confront us now is the dead hand of the Treasury, which is clearly heavier than ever under the present Prime Minister.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) offered us a curious argument which ignored the alternatives set out in the Kemp report. He argued that the existence of European regulations which have nothing to do with this Bill and nothing to do with any part of the ECGD somehow leads to an imperative for the Government to take action in this piece of legislation. This is complete nonsense. The Government's most enthusiastic supporters have been reduced to gobbledygook in this debate in trying to defend Government.

We have had the whole question of the EC. This was dealt with by Mr. Kemp in his report. I would point the Minister to the paragraph on page 52 when, having considered the European legislation and regulations, he points out that the Government have not accepted the argument that the arrangements gave unfair advantage to the exporters using their national schemes compared with exporters in other member states. There would thus, he said,

"appear to be strong grounds for arguing that the Commission has *de facto* given its approval to state support for export credit agencies as at present practised by member states, with the exception of those activities that have been specifically declared unacceptable under the Treaty."

The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) and his straight man, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), both of whom have fled the Chamber, exposed the weakness of the Government's case, because, when they were asked to point to regulations, they could point to none, not even draft regulations, on the issues covered by the Bill. The best that they could do was to refer to article 92 signed in 1957, and it is clear that there is no pressure from Europe for us to move towards exposing our export industry. The EC is being used by the Government as a scapegoat for this piece of indefensible legislation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is there not the non-life directive which means that the European marketplace is now open for competition in credit insurance, among other forms of insurance, throughout the European Community? Is there not therefore a necessity at least to provide some new structure for ECGD because Europe will be the home market? Does not this measure give us an excellent opportunity to bring about that restructuring?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) follows his colleagues by using a piece of EC legislation which has no relevence to this Bill to try to give it some sort of relevance in defence of the Government. I admire his persistence in doing that, but I can neither admire nor respect his logic. There is no logic in his argument.

Not only is there no regulation to which the Government can point, but, even if new regulations or

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legislation were introduced in the EC, ample time—at least two or three years—would be allowed for credit insurers to change to the extent necessary. There is therefore no hurry.

Even more helpfully than other colleagues, the hon. Member for Epping asked the House the simple question: does the Bill help or hinder exporters? It is a simple question and it has two simple answers: it will not help and it will hinder. He had to call in aid a curious logic that led him into home affairs and an anonymous quotation in order to make the accusation that the Opposition are ineffective on this issue. I remind the House that it is the Government who refuse to look at any option but one at the present time.

I would also remind the House that we have reason to be concerned about the future. The Treasury will make an input to the review of ECGD in 1992-93, and it is bound then to press its preference for the zero option. The Minister must state categorically how long the Government will continue the support which was promised at the beginning of this debate. When introducing the Bill, the Minister failed to answer that question put to him very simply indeed: how long? It must be answered when he winds up, or we shall know that the answer to "how long" is "too short".

The hon. Member for Teignbridge went on to quote today's *Financial Times*. Selectively he quoted the most extreme paragraph of the only article, while these matters have been under debate anywhere in the press, to show any real favour to the Government's line—and even that article had to admit, rather weakly, that

"privatisation has not yet been forced on the government by the European Commission. Simply changing the ECGD's charter might allow it scope to compete in the single market."

So even that article—the one supporter of the Government's curious approach—condemns the very case that a few hon. Members, a minority of hon. Members, on the Government Benches have sought to sustain today.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Teignbridge has read other articles in the *Financial Times*. Did he see, for instance, the article on 10 January with the headline:

"Exporters fear fresh drain on their credit."

A sub-heading read:

"Resentment at the way British companies are denied the support enjoyed by continental rivals has prompted an unlikely alliance between City, industry and Labour."

That is not an unlikely composition, because the City and industry are becoming increasingly aware of the solid and responsible way in which Labour's team is dealing with these matters, which is leading them to an increasing consensus with Labour on the importance of having a Labour Government to deal properly with these issues.

I will cite two aspects of that article in the *Financial Times*. It quotes the London Chamber of Trade as saying:

"It is imperative that the existing level of service to exporters from Cardiff, both in terms of the markets covered and the credit period available, should not be diminished."

Could we be clearer than that? The article also said:

"Other European governments show no sign of winding down this kind of government support, but Whitehall has decreed that after a three-year transition period it will be withdrawn in the UK.

The government line that private reinsurers will quickly step in to fill the gap is hotly disputed in the marketplace, where withdrawal of support is seen as unilateral export disarmament. Adding to the exporters' alarm is the declining appetite for political risk reinsurance which the Gulf crisis has inspired in the Lloyd's market."

It is clear that the arguments of my hon. Friends, reinforced by gentle queries from Government Back Benchers, are correct, and that the case against the Bill is overwhelming.

The *Financial Times* article pointed out that the service of ISG in Cardiff is particularly valued by exporters in high risk countries. No hon. Member would deny that there are too many high risk areas in the world in which we have to compete if Britain's export record is to be restored from the dismal levels to which it has sunk under the Governnment. The *Financial Times* accurately reflects the views of the Labour party, of those who work in the ECGD and of exporters in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), in a characteristically thoughtful contribution, referred to the need for regional networks. Of course, the ISG has that network and a strong contact with all parts of the United Kingdom. Those of us who have battled locally against the Government's neglect of the regions will endorse his remarks wholeheartedly.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) gave a series of warnings to the Minister and approached the question of competition within Europe in a sober and considered manner, much in contrast with the confidence shown outwardly by Ministers. He rightly identified the insistence of Ministers on not answering questions as highly suspicious. I suspect that their refusal to answer questions is more in their nature than in the brief. I do not think that it is fair to blame the civil servants. It is Ministers who have been refusing to answer straight questions put to them, not only today but in written questions, in discussions and in private meetings ever since the privatisation measure was first considered.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who represents a part of Wales with relatively small industry and where Government help and support are much needed, did an excellent demolition job on the Government's case. Like many of us, he wants to know why the Government are responding to EC signals which are as covert as a smuggler's lamp, but from Back Benchers and Government alike, answer comes there none.

I state it simply: Europe has not pressed the Government to change in the way set out in the Bill. State-supported operations, such as those in France, have not fallen foul of European law or regulations. Time and again in parliamentary questions, Ministers have been offered opportunities to provide evidence for their claim that Europe is pushing us in that direction, but they have been no more successful than the hon. and motley Member for Teignbridge in producing the faintest iota of fact to back that claim. I shall be most surprised if the Minister, in his reply, does more than skirt around that attitude. It is a simple question. Let him, if he can, give us a simple answer.

The Minister, intervening on my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), asked what we would say if the Government failed to take action in good time. If they did that we would say that they were wrong, neglectful and stupid, but it is not what is happening with this Bill. I must again insist that Ministers, encouraged by Back Benchers of an extreme disposition, are jumping like lemmings when no one with any interest in encouraging exports is pushing them to take the actions outlined in this Bill.

It is a matter of fact that almost 80 per cent. of the insurance cover with existing customers is with customers having a turnover below £1 million a year. That is an extremely important part of our export industry. I draw the House's attention to the large number of jobs created in recent years—often not acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Wales, the Secretary of State for the Environment or the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—through joint enterprises, work by local authorities, joint enterprises with private industry, such as the Cardiff and Vale enterprise in my own constituency, to build up the economy and help people start up in business, stay in business and expand. In the last two years, ECGD has been constrained by the Government to make swingeing increases in the premium rates it charges to businesses with £1 million turnover or less. That situation will be much worse after privatisation and the Government are wrong to place those businesses and the business that they bring to this country at risk.

The hon. Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) expressed concern that over 70 per cent. of businesses do not currently export. He was right to express that concern. The Minister's response that it would be useful for those firms to insure with one body is mischievous nonsense. These are just the types of businesses which need the security and confidence that come from a Government-backed institution and need an efficient public service to support them in their intitiatives and provide them with fresh encouragement to that end.

Mr. Sainsbury: In his very categorical statement the hon. Gentleman has said there would be, definitely, swingeing increases in premiums for small businesses. He says that small businesses have to have Government-backed insurance. Does that apply to all their other insurances? Can he produce facts to justify those allegations?

Mr. Michael: I can certainly state categorically, as I did, that there have been swingeing increases for small businesses which insure through ECGD. We know from the views of private industry, which have been expressed on the business of reinsurance, that this is an unpopular area which they would not take on board without increases in the insurance. That is far less of a surmise than the load of waffle that we have had from the Government Benches, both ministerially and from Back Benchers, since the beginning of this debate. If the Minister is so keen to be challenging on this issue, let him answer the simple question that I have asked him again and again: where is the evidence of EC regulations that bring about the requirement for any change? I see that he does not wish to.

In a written answer last week, the Secretary of State stated two principles. He said:

"The Government continue to attach great importance to United Kingdom project and capital goods exports and to maintaining a viable and stable framework of ECGD support."

Secondly, he said:

"the international debt crisis, and more recently the events in the Gulf, have shown the risks which are assumed by ECGD to be potentially very significant." [*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 359.]

That is important. The problem is that the second one is so important that it is overriding the first one in the Government's mind, not because they want to help industry but because they are worried about the financial commitment involved in giving support to private industry. I regret that the Ministers seem to have lost their battle with the Treasury in seeking to balance those priorities.

I point again to the confirmation in the Kemp report that there is no pressure from the United Kingdom exporting community or from the commercial sector generally for this changing status in any part of ECGD. The Kemp report also showed that the private sector does not and cannot provide services equivalent to those currently provided by that department.

Kemp also said—this is directly relevant to the question that the Minister asked me a moment ago:

"It was also stated frankly by some brokers that small policy holders, were not commercially interesting to them and that there was no prospect of the private sector providing the counselling and service that such policy holders received at present through the ECGD regional organisations."

Not only will there be increases in premiums over and above those forced by the Government's dogma, but the service will deteriorate.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West rightly challenged the Government's view that the private sector is waiting in the wings to take the risk. He was equally right to discuss the partial view that the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood put forward. No sound business case exists for this privatisation. The decision to privatise is purely political. We accept that there would be increased competition for ISG services but consider that it would best be met by extending the scope of ECGD's activities so that it could insure exports from other EC countries and possibly United Kingdom domestic trade.

If implemented, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West said, the privatisation of the ISG would directly affect more than 600 civil servants based in Cardiff and the regional network. At this stage, the proposal is for transfer to the Government company to be voluntary, but the most likely outcome, as he rightly said, is that insufficient staff will volunteer and coercion will prove necessary. Their transfer would be covered by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, which merely impose the offer by a purchaser of an overall employment package which is no worse than that available in the civil service. All that that means is that those conditions apply on day one. There is no guarantee for employees on day two.

Why break up an efficient and successful operation? Why remove the conditions and security that employees have? Why attack morale in a department and an operation important to our national interest? Those questions must be answered, but have not been answered in this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West made a modest plea for staff in Cardiff. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) offered a promise, which he asked the Minister to reinforce, that staff conditions will not be adversely affected by the change. I share his hope that the Minister will clear that up but, even better, we shall hold the hon. Member for Nottingham, South to his promise when we consider these issues in Committee and seek to improve the protection of staff. There is no change on day one, but change on day two and thereafter offers no guarantee of hope for the future of those staff.

The right hon. Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) emphasised that he was not a whingeing exporter and underlined the importance of backing our

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exporters. In effect, he agreed that there is no evidence of competitor countries rushing in the same lemming-like way to undermine their industrial capacity to export.

We know that there has been a renewed wrangle in Government in recent weeks, with the Chancellor wanting a clear break with no future commitment for finance from the Government on activities with which competitor countries are helped by their Governments. We know that small exporters are angry that the Government propose to hand political risk insurance to the private sector, making it less likely that United Kingdom manufacturers will be able to get protection for contracts where there is political instability. It is difficult to imagine circumstances which more graphically illustrate the importance of political risk insurance than the situation today, when our country is at war and when the political situation in eastern Europe and many other parts of the world offer a major challenge to our economy.

I highlight the comments of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service on the autumn statement. It underlined again and again the importance of exports to our economy. Paragraph 22 of its report stated:

"Exporting may become increasingly difficult. An economic recovery based on increasing the growth of exports in the second half of 1991 is therefore far from assured. If the United Kingdom's export performance should falter, in the absence of some offsetting support from other components of domestic demand, the forecast for resumption of non-oil economic growth will not be achieved."

That is put at risk by the venture on which the Government are foolishly embarking. They were warned by the Select Committee that the outlook for the next year is, if anything, even more uncertain, with the consequence that potential errors could be greater than those implied by the average of past errors. We appeal to the Minister not to compound those errors by pressing ahead with this legislation.

We ask the Minister to defend British interests. He must surely accept the progression of events which will be inevitable once the Bill becomes an Act. He must accept that important issues need to be addressed. He must tell us how the Government will continue to meet their obligation to encourage United Kingdom trade once ECGD is privatised this year. Currently that is part of the work of ECGD. Has the Minister taken full cognisance of the recommendation of Ernst and Whinney in which it said that it

"would not advocate the sale of ISG into the private sector in the absence of historical financial information. The absence of that information makes the raising of capital in the private market at best difficult at present, and could, in any case, significantly reduce the sale proceeds obtainable by Government for the business"?

That was a warning given by Ernst and Whinney. The Government have not responded by providing the House or those who are anxious about the future of ISG and our export industry with the financial facts. I suspect that that failure will be compounded by the Minister failing to give an answer today.

I urge the Minister to accept that, if he fails to defend British interests as we seek—especially in view of the Treasury's intransigence—it will be only a matter of time before decisions are taken on purely financial grounds and no attention is paid to public policy or national interest. Then it will be only a matter of time before overseas ownership dilutes still further the increasingly tenuous link between our national interest and our export trade. It will then be only a matter of time before the pressures of commercial logic squeeze out trade which involves risk but is important to our national economy. It will be only a matter of time before jobs become less secure, high-quality senior staff in the ISG move elsewhere, conditions of work deteriorate and an important national asset is wasted.

Like the leech in the middle ages, the Government's cure is more painful than the condition that they seek to cure. The reasons put forward sound remarkably similar. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood suggested that ECGD was not dying but going to another place. That sounds mealy-mouthed. Misplaced faith is the main characteristic of the No Turning Back group, a breed which seems to be a curious cross between a lemming and a rottweiler.

I urge the Government to accept that privatisation is a high-risk strategy. It is a sobering thought, but it is a fact, that if the insurance services group had been privatised two or three years ago, it could have been made insolvent purely as a result of the stock market crash of October 1987.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West said that industry wants a Government who care about its difficulties and about exports. He is right. We need a Government who want a fresh strength in British industry and who care about our manufacturing base and our need for future success in export trade. For that, and for a determination to return to common sense on the issues debated today, British exporters will have to wait for a Labour Government. The Opposition will vote against this ill-considered and short-sighted legislation.

9.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): We have had an interesting debate on this important legislation. Several points were raised and I shall try in the time available to answer the main questions. I shall reply in writing to any points that I cannot answer because of time constraints.

I apologise if I cannot reply to everything that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said in his machine-gun delivery. I am sorry that he thinks that I am a cross between a lemming and a rottweiler. I like to think that I am rather a gentle sort. But I shall disappoint him in one respect. Contrary to his suggestion, I have not decided at this stage to withdraw the Bill. I have made that decision for good reasons.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said—he has apologised for the fact that urgent business elsewhere has unfortunately taken him away from the closing speeches—we all have a common aim. If we disagree on everything else in the debate, I hope that we can agree that our aim is to improve the services to our exporters. That is the key point in the debate. I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) and for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) that our aim is simply to speed up the response rate and efficiency of ECGD.

In closing the debate, I should first make absolutely clear what the Government propose to privatise and why we believe it to be necessary. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade explained, ECGD's operations fall into two distinct categories. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) emphasised

that distinction. First, there is the insurance of project exports, such as aircraft, process plant and construction projects, involving credit terms of a least five years and often as long as 10 years. Secondly, there is the insurance of mainstream exports—anything from confectionery to cars—where credit risks of not more than six months need to be insured.

The first category of business, averaging more than £2 billion of exports each year, is handled by ECGD's project group based in London. Let me assure my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) that the Bill will not affect in any way ECGD's support for project exports. I also assure my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that there is no wish among Treasury Ministers to weaken ECGD's contribution to the support of project exports.

Support for such business requires ECGD to underwrite large value payment risks, usually in developing countries, which can persist for as long as 20 years. Clearly, that requires some extremely difficult judgments to be made about the future. There is obviously a risk that, despite using the best information and best efforts to arrive at a right decision, events sometimes do not turn out as well as anticipated and ECGD has to face a claim.

Of course we want to support our exporters, contrary to what the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) suggested in her opening speech. No one involved in the financing of international trade predicted that we would have a debt crisis as severe as that which arose in the early 1980s. ECGD shared that experience, and the results have shown up in the large deficits that have emerged in its financial results during the past few years.

I can tell the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) that privatisation has nothing to do with ECGD's deficit, which is due entirely to the project business.

Dr. Hampson: Is it not fair to say that ECGD has done considerably less badly than most of our competitor countries' systems?

Mr. Leigh: Yes, it is fair to say that. Clearly, we are in a difficult position, a point that I know my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West made most powerfully in his speech. The aim of the system that we are introducing is to address a problem that undoubtedly needs solving.

The experience of the debt crisis in the world prompted the initiative that resulted in the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry last week of the introduction of the portfolio management system. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade dealt with that in some detail in his opening speech.

I accept that the portfolio management system contains some elements that our exporters would prefer not to see, which is unremarkable. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade said, ECGD's support for project exports has, in recent years, proved to be an expensive business for the taxpayer, largely as a result of the debt crisis. However, by no stretch of the imagination can our policy response in the face of the mounting cost of that support be characterised, as some have tried to do in the debate—particularly the hon. Member for Gateshead, East—as its effective withdrawal. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) made that clear today.

We have not withdrawn support, because we recognise that, without it, our exporters' prospects of winning business in the face of fierce international competition would be seriously damaged. But we also recognise that, even if others should want to do that, there is no point in supporting exports that stand little chance of being paid for—a point made in the *Financial Times* article today. It is all a question of trying to draw a sensible balance that recognises not only the competitive needs of exporters but also the risks of the taxpayer. PMS is simply the risk-analysis framework that helps us in that task. There is nothing sinister about it. It does not take decisions for us; that difficult task will quite properly rest with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the understanding of the ECGD itself is that premium rates in the United Kingdom are higher than those of major overseas competitors?

Mr. Leigh: Rates vary from market to market, but I can confirm that, on average, United Kingdom rates are high. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that one advantage of PMS is that it will result in higher risks requiring higher premiums, and in lower risks requiring lower premiums. That seems to be entirely sensible. My hon. Friend, in his contribution, raised some very interesting questions. I hope that he will accept that, given the debt crisis, we had to introduce PMS for the sake of the taxpayer as well as of the exporter.

The first fruits of PMS have been to demonstrate, first, the risk posed for the ECGD scheme of its being unduly exposed on high-risk markets and, secondly, the extent to which its current premium rates are not sufficiently matched to the risk. In response to the latter point, the ECGD will be increasing its rates on the higher-risk markets. Overall, its premium income is expected to rise by about 10 per cent. This must be seen as a minimum response to the problem, and to represent it as an unnecessary or serious blow to our exporters' competitiveness is both to mislead and to exaggerate.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I have been listening carefully to the Minister's reply. Can he assure the House and the large textile companies, particularly those in Yorkshire, that what the Government are proposing will not adversely affect the ability of those companies to export throughout the world?

Mr. Leigh: Textile exports will be covered by Insurance Services, but I have noted my hon. Friend's question.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West that there is no question of short-termism, that premium rate subsidies will be eliminated only on the basis of multilateral international agreement. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford said that we must not go down the road of unilateralism. We have no intention of so doing.

I should like to deal now with individual markets. Decisions on the volume of ECGD cover on individual markets are both more difficult and more important. Clearly, given recent experience, it would be quite irresponsible of the Government not to adopt a prudent and disciplined approach to arriving at these judgments. However, this does not mean that, on the more difficult markets, cover will be withdrawn. I can give that assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West,

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who also raised the point. What it does mean is that we shall need to look more carefully at the balance between national interest and risk.

The starting point will obviously be a wish on the part of the Government to help our exporters to win worthwhile export contracts. The constraint will be the assessment of the financial risk in doing so. There will be extremely difficult judgments to make, but we are confident that the result will be ECGD's continuing to give our exporters the support they need to compete successfully for overseas projects that represent a not unreasonable credit risk.

The suggestion that the Government are not committed to support for project exports is simply not borne out by the facts. The suggestion that more could be done and that PMS should be abandoned is beguiling and may win friends in some quarters, but it is an irresponsible denial of the hard lessons of the recent past and the debt burden that we face. I believe that the difficult decisions we have taken represent the only way forward and a good deal for our exporters.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My hon. Friend knows that successive Governments have come under enormous pressure from contractors and others engaged in projects overseas for support from the taxpayer—from ECGD—on account of the fact that certain countries do not represent a good long-term risk for the contractors. Is it not the case that the Government, throughout their lifetime, have solidly demonstrated their maximum support for industry—particularly through the aid and trade contingency provision when exporters claim that they are up against unfair competition, especially from the French? This provision was designed by the Government to ensure that exporters would be able to go out and win contracts.

Mr. Leigh: I am glad that my hon. Friend for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), who is a banker and knows about these things, has had an opportunity to make the point that he has been waiting to make all day.

By contrast, the second category of the ECGD's business—exports on short-term credit totalling some £14 billion each year handled by the insurance services group in Cardiff—presents underwriting risks that can be managed much more effectively, and where the meeting of a given financial objective is much more achievable. Hundreds of thousands of export transactions are involved each year and about 75 per cent. of this business concerns commercial risks in the EC and OECD countries. It is already run by ECGD as a commercial activity and without Government subsidy. Even if there were not overriding reasons to want to change its current status, it would be a strong candidate for privatisation.

I emphasise that the prime motivation for privatisation arose from an assessment in an expert and independent review commissioned in 1988 by the then Secretary of State, and known as the Kemp report, which has been referred to several times. It concluded that, if Insurance Services were to be able to continue to provide our exporters with the service they need, it simply had to go through a change of status.

I make it clear, in response to a point raised by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), that, according to the Kemp report, a financial track record should be established. This track record can be created retrospectively out of Insurance Services' past activities. This is being done so that investors will immediately have relevant information. Therefore, early privatisation is both possible and desirable for that reason.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade referred to the competitive and legal challenges confronting Insurance Services and the risk that, without a change of status, these challenges could deprive the ECGD of the best 75 per cent. of its business. It would clearly be a denial of the Government's responsibility both to our exporters and to the taxpayer to allow a situation to develop where the short-term business of this fine organisation was reduced to the status of an insurer of last resort, focusing only on exports to the developing countries.

I must repeat that these are the considerations that have led us to the conclusion that privatisation is essential and that maintaining the status quo is simply not an option. The other benefits that we can expect to flow from privatisation in terms of greater flexibility are icing on the cake. I shall deal now with some more specific issues. Some have played down the competitive pressures to which the insurance services business is subject. They have also challenged the Government's view that, even if it were a credible option on other grounds, which it is not, maintaining the status quo for the insurance services business will, in due course, become an option that will face serious legal challenge from Brussels.

The competitive challenge was mentioned in particular by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade. We know, although some Opposition Members seem not to accept this, that competition is vital, and we cannot pretend that it does not exist. That is a luxury in which business managers cannot afford to indulge, and they certainly do not wait until they have lost their best customers before deciding that, yes, they do have a bit of a competitive problem about which they should do something. I accept that, at present, Insurance Services is the dominant supplier of short-term export credit insurance in the United Kingdom, but only a few years ago it enjoyed a virtual monopoly. This process of greater competition can only accelerate as the single market becomes a reality.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My hon. Friend is on to a good point. New entrants from the continental and American markets are already in the market in the United Kingdom and the ECGD no longer enjoys a monopoly. It has 70 per cent. of the market, and is under threat. Therefore, the Bill will provide the ECGD with an opportunity to restructure so that it can meet the challenge.

Mr. Leigh: That is absolutely right. My hon. Friend knows about the competitive environment in which the ECGD exists, and is right to emphasise that point. British companies will cease for credit insurance purposes to compartmentalise their business into domestic, EC and OECD work. They will see, indeed are seeing, the advantages of a single insurance policy covering all their needs. They will be able to look at a wider range of insurers —companies throughout Europe which have been freed from the insurance directive to market their services throughout the community.

Where will Insurance Services be in all this if we do not change its status? Almost certainly, it will be struggling to maintain market share against a tide of new competition

with one hand tied behind its back. This would be disastrous for the business, its customers—our exporters —the staff and the taxpayer. A privatised insurance service will be able to compete fairly and equally.

The legal challenge was lightly dismissed by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin). Although the Kemp report was written some years ago, increasing attention is being paid in Brussels to the problems associated with the single market and state subsidy of export insurance. We recognise that this work is being carried out. It is right to address that problem and to act in good time.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest said most clearly, the treaty of Rome says all that is needed on the subject. Where state involvement distorts competition, article 92 makes it clear that this would represent state aid, which is incompatible with the Common Market.

Ms. Quin: I have article 92 in front of me. There are several exceptions in the article, which makes it quite clear that aid can be granted in specific areas and areas which can be agreed at any point by the European Council of Ministers. Would the Minister also accept that there is a tremendous variety of levels of state aid given in the European Community? In fact, both Germany and Italy give more than we do, and those aids are deemed compatible with the Common Market. Therefore, to rely on article 92, as the Minister and his hon. Friends have done, is a delusion in this case.

Mr. Leigh: It is not a delusion. If the hon. Lady reads article 92, she will see that those exceptions do not apply to exports to EC and OECD countries. Therefore, her point does not apply. There is almost universal recognition within the relevant expert working group in Brussels that much short-term export credit insurance is an area of genuine competition between private sector and state insurers, and that the latter enjoy advantages which make for unfair competition under the treaty of Rome. Discussion is centering on how to make the playing field level, but while the debate goes on, virtually all EC Governments are considering steps to distance their official agencies from the state as far as cover for short term export credits is concerned.

Examples were quoted, particularly by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) about what is happening in other European countries. In Germany and in the Netherlands, the structure which we are trying to achieve, involving a private company handling short-term business but benefiting from Government backing in respect of the more difficult risks, already exists. In France, state reinsurance of the bulk of short-term political risks has been transferred to the commercial reinsurance market.

Denmark is considering the privatisation of its official agency. Portugal is moving partially to privatise its agency, and we know that the Belgians are reviewing the status of theirs. If that is not a picture of our competitors in the EC taking action to address his problem, I do not know what is. I do not believe that we could accept a halfway house. It is dangerously misleading to suggest that there is some safer, no-change haven which the Government are deliberately trying to ignore.

Some myths have been perpetrated in this debate. First of all, let me deal with exporters. At every stage in the process culminating in this Bill, there has been overwhelming endorsement by all interested parties of the Government's analysis of the threats confronting insurance services.

Contrary to the impression given by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, the response has been overwhelming. I hope that exporters listen to the facts and are reassured. I cannot emphasise enough that the motivation behind the exercise has all along been a desire on the Government's part to ensure that the ECGD was placed in the best position to meet exporters' needs after 1992.

The truth about the alleged lack of interest is that some parts of the press, particularly *The Guardian*, have speculated and got it badly wrong. The fact is that serious interest has been and continues to be shown— *[Interruption.]* It is a pity that Opposition Members are not listening. Serious interest has been and continues to be shown in buying the business on the part of a good number of institutions from a variety of backgrounds. That should hardly be a surprise, given the expertise and experience of the business which is on offer. It is more surprising that the more pessimistic scenario should be given any credibility. Perhaps it suited the book of those opposed to privatisation to peddle such myths.

On staff implications, I pay particular attention to the comments made by the hon. Members for Warrington, North, for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) for Cardiff, South and Penarth and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). First, I emphasise the importance that the Government attach to maintaining the commitment and skills of the staff concerned. That is vital for the company's future success. The new owners will readily understand that when offering the transferring staff terms and conditions of employment to replace those that they currently enjoy in the civil service.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: I still have some points to make, so I must continue. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked for certain assurances.

To the extent that the Government can do so through the Bill and other arrangements, they will give staff the reassurance that their terms and conditions would be at least as good as their present ones. Once a final package has been negotiated with the new owners——

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have liked to have the assurance that I am now giving to the staff of the ECGD.

Once the final package has been negotiated with the new owners, the staff will be given a clear month in which to assess it and to state their final preferences as to whether they wish to join the new company or to remain in the civil service. It has throughout been the Government's intention that the eventual allocation of staff to the company and the ECGD should reflect the final preferences—I emphasise those words—expressed by staff, where that is consistent with the business needs of the new organisation.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No.

In this debate, my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and I have succeeded in showing that the impetus for the measure has not been imposed from above as a matter of

[Mr. Leigh]

ideology. It has come up from below, to meet the competitive challenge facing the industry and because of the legal position facing our exporters.

During the past 10 years, the Government have transformed the economic climate for our exporters. We in this Department are determined to ensure that the demands of society are met by the business environment. We have made that business environment possible by cutting taxes, by privatisation measures and by deregulation.

Contrary to what has been explained and claimed in the debate by Opposition Members, there has been an enormous interest in the privatisation measure. We must not disappoint those people who are interested in buying what will be a successful first-rate company and a major private institution standing up for Britain and for our exporters.

The Labour party's do-nothing approach is typical, but it ignores the real world. It simply will not wash. It ignores the legal and competitive challenge facing the industry. We are used to the Labour party doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, but it seems to be suggesting today that we should be doing the wrong thing for no reason at all.

The Government are determined to create a business environment in a changing export world where our exporters are fully supported. We intend to see the Bill through to its conclusion, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 223.

Division No. 43] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael

Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment—I am on my feet.

Export and Investment Guarantees Bill [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—
Motion made, and Question proposed,

That for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill ('the Act'), it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments or defraying his administrative expenses under the Act and the charging on and payment out of the Consolidated Fund of sums not paid out of money provided by Parliament which are required by the Secretary of State for fulfilling his liabilities under the Act, and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am sorry about the point of order by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but I had to get in, or the money resolution would have gone through on the nod, and I know that you, Mr. Speaker, and the House would not like that. It is rather strange that the Government are making such a fuss over this Bill instead of renewing it, because every stage of the original Bill, the Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment Act 1978, which is mentioned in the explanatory and financial memorandum, went through on the nod on 13 June 1978. Where were the Tory Opposition in 1978, if such legislation is now so unnecessary tht it was allowed to go through without protest? The only difference that I can see is this: whereas we had an export surplus then, we now have a £20 billion deficit, and the Government are proposing to jettison an important component of assistance.

I hope that the Government will not be prejudiced in favour of the Bill, and the financial support for it granted under clauses 5 and 6, by the fact that, as recently as March 1989—unaware, apparently, of the true character of the Iraqi regime—they increased ECGD provision for Iraq from £175 million to £340 million. You will be surprised to learn, Mr. Speaker, that that was done shortly after the regime gassed the Kurds.

It is a bit startling that the Government should use money for that purpose. I hope that the privatisation provisions in clause 8 have not been brought about by prejudice as a result of political decisions in favour of the Iraqi regime that were made by the Government of which both Ministers were officers.

Mr. Nellist: Is my hon. Friend aware that the same thing happened on another occasion? In October 1988, the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office —now Secretary of State for Health—reported to the House that people known colloquially as "marsh Arabs", living in villages north of Basra——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What has this to do with the ECGD?

Mr. Nellist: I am explaining that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, try and explain it to me.

Mr. Nellist: I am not making a point of order, Mr. Speaker; this is an intervention, and you would see its relevance if you allowed me to complete it.

Mr. Speaker: I am anxious to find out whether the hon. Gentleman is in order.

Mr. Nellist: My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer)—without being challenged on the ground that he is out of order—has mentioned an occasion when a certain event in Iraq resulted in a reward: the doubling of trade credits by the Government, under ECGD provision. I was reminding him that a similar event took place in October 1988, when the present Secretary of State for Health reported to the House that thousands of people were being killed in Iraq. Nine days later, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was responsible for the Department that we are discussing tonight, increased trade credits to Iraq by another £440 million.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's remarks might have been very relevant to the main debate, but the House is now debating the money resolution.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Before the Minister points out that I missed his opening speech, let me explain that I have been chairing the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and then attending the Select Committee on Members' Interests, and was therefore unable to listen to what he had to say. He may have given a comprehensive explanation of the position; when winding up, however, the Minister failed to do so, so it is fair for me to raise these points. I know that the Minister is anxious to provide an explanation.

What concerns me is the amount of money under clause 6, which limits our commitments in sterling to £35 million; this figure cannot be exceeded. In the case of commitments in foreign currency, special drawing rights must not exceed 15,000 million. I take it that the 15,000 million is in any specific currency that the Secretary of State may choose, because no currency is defined in the Bill. It would seem reasonable to do so. I hope that the Minister can give that explanation.

I hope that the Minister will accept that the changes at ECGD and the proposed privatisation are matters of concern to our exporters who seek Government assistance. As has been made clear during the debate, the premiums charged by ECGD are far from the lowest in the Common Market; they cannot therefore be regarded as state assistance and hence in breach of the treaty of Rome. On balance, the charges for the United Kingdom are generally higher than in other countries, so surely the ECGD cannot possibly be criticised as state assistance and therefore a distortion of competition under the lunatic treaty of Rome.

The Secretary of State is given powers under clause 6 to increase the limits of various subsections, and they are set out clearly in the Bill as being under affirmative order. In clause 15(3), the powers to make orders under clauses 5 or 6—that includes increases of money and so comes within the financial resolution—come in the form of an affirmative resolution. Everyone welcomes that, because it gives us the opportunity to debate the issue.

But there is another important part which is affected by the money resolution, because it relates to the costs to the Minister arising out of this Bill. Under clause 8, the Minister has the power to provide a scheme to transfer or delegate ECGD functions. This is the privatisation part.

I have looked at the legislation, because it uses rather strange language in clause 8: it apparently gives the Secretary of State power to issue certificates. The clause is written in such a way that it sounds as though it is a statutory instrument issued by the Minister, but it is not; it is a scheme to

"transfer to any person or persons such property, rights and liabilities as are specified in or determined in accordance with the scheme".

Do I take it from this that the Minister is being given power to produce a scheme without further reference to the House, because the provisions in clause 8 have the ring of delegated legislation-making powers? If that is the case, surely clause 8 should also be subject to clause 15(3). If I look at clause 15, however, I can find no reference to clause 8 of the Bill. In this question of delegated powers, it is very important that the Minister be accountable to the House and that, in a scheme like this, which gives the Minister power to hive off a perfectly proper, efficient and, in one part, profitable provision for our exporters—we have an enormous balance of payments deficit and need every possible assistance——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The war will make it worse.

Mr. Cryer —the Minister should come to the House and provide an account of the scheme, so that we can approve or reject it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) points out, our economic position will not be improved by this war, but rather made worse. That means an even more important obligation on the Minister, who is being given power under the motion to pay the costs of the scheme, and to bring the scheme back to the House for approval on an affirmative resolution. I hope that he will say that the point will be considered in Committee, and that he will accept that the House should have proper accountability, so that he does not do just what he wants with the money in the privatisation proposal.

10.25 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I am sure that the House appreciates that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has had extremely important things to do in connection with the business of the House and the Committees to which he has referred. We share his regret that he could not be present for any of the proceedings on Second Reading of this important Bill. If he could have been present, in spite of his other commitments, I suspect that he would have found that many of the points that he has raised were answered in the debate. When he reads *Hansard* tomorrow with his usual care, I am sure that he will find that to be the position. If there remain any points that he feels have not been answered, I shall be happy to answer them.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister has been misinformed about my not being present for any part of the debate. That is not true. I was present for the latter part of the debate and, had there been time, I might have spoken earlier. I listened to the whole reply of his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. I hope that the Minister will accept that correction.

Mr. Sainsbury: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. He missed an excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), which he might have found helpful.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the matters before us have no connection whatever with Iraq. The increases in clause 6 to which he referred follow normal procedure. Incidentally, I may point out to him that the amount involved is not £35 million but £35 billion, which is a fairly substantial sum. The clause follows the normal procedure.

These matters will be examined carefully in Committee. I hope that we may have the pleasure of the hon. Gentleman's presence in Committee to ensure that they are so examined.

Question put and agreed to.

The Gulf

10.27 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During your careful reply to my request at 3.30 pm for an adjournment under Standing Order No. 20 to discuss the detonation and ignition of Kuwaiti oilfields by Iraq, you said that it would indeed be a serious matter if it could be shown to be true. Alas, it is only too true, as pictures have shown the Al Wafra oilfield blazing and billowing out the blackest of smoke.

The House might also expect some response to the tragic loss of a fifth Tornado and, most urgently, because it is self-evidently a matter of extreme urgency, to the attack on Tel Aviv tonight. The Leader of the House or another senior Minister may be able to outline what the Government's response will be.

The Leader of the House (Mr. John MacGregor): It may be for the convenience of the House if I respond to the hon. Gentleman. I believe that it is premature to make a statement now. I am advised that there is no firm evidence to confirm media reports. I suggest that we make a judgment tomorrow, in the light of confirmed facts, as to whether a statement is justified.

It might be helpful if I add that we are obviously keen to keep the House fully informed. We have already amply demonstrated that. Equally, it is not realistic to expect a statement on every new incident in the Gulf as it occurs. It will be necessary to make judgments as and when the need arises to justify a specific statement. We can discuss that matter as appropriate through the usual channels.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: I am not certain that any points of order can arise out of that, but I will call Mr. Ewing.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House has generously said that statements will be made as the occasion arises, but that the Government cannot make a statement on every incident. The attack on Tel Aviv is not just any incident. I do not need to spell out to the House or to those beyond the House the consequences which may flow from that attack. We could be overnight in the most catastrophic and serious position of all time. I hope that the House of Commons is not being denied a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence or the Foreign Secretary while at the same time they are holding press conferences outside. If that practice is adopted, in my judgment the House will wholly reject it.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly the point. The entire world this evening is discussing the incredibly dramatic developments in this affair. There are flames from Tel Aviv to Saudi Arabia. There are dead people in the streets from Tel Aviv to Saudi Arabia. Why cannot the House of Commons hear from the Government their perception of what has happened, and debate it, as the whole world is doing this evening?

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely the key point is that it is clear from statements by the Israeli ambassador to Britain that Israel reserves the right to respond to the attack undoubtedly made upon it in recent hours. It is clear also that the British Government are making representations to the Israeli Government, presumably urging that they do not retaliate, because if they did this would be an extremely serious escalation of the war in the Gulf.

Secondly, surely, as this is a United Nations-authorised war, the Security Council should be in permanent session to consider——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps that is so, but it is not a matter for me on a point of order. I repeat what I said this afternoon, that these are very serious matters, but the whole House has heard what the Leader of the House has said—that he will carefully consider whether a statement should be made about this tomorrow. I have nothing further to add; it is not my responsibility. Mr. Hood.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House tells the House that he is not in a position to confirm any of the stories that have been going round this place all day. I can tell him that American television has been running and confirming the same stories all day. It is a bit unbelievable when our Government say that they cannot confirm stories that have already been confirmed by American television. We want to know why the right hon. Gentleman cannot come to the Dispatch Box and give us some explanation of what has happened.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As one who spent some hours the other night speculating on television about a chemical attack on Tel Aviv, can I say that it really is quite wise for the Government to wait until facts are confirmed rather than this House joining in general speculation on television and radio reports that may turn out to be unjustified? In return for that, would the Leader of the House assure us that such statements will be made regularly, daily, as required, to the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I appreciate the opening comments of the right hon. Gentleman. I think that we have to judge all these developments as and when they occur and the need arises. It would be a mistake to say that we will make daily statements to the House, because I think it is necessary to judge each of the incidents. But I should have thought that we had made it very clear by what we have done in the past week that the Government are taking every step to keep the House fully informed both of the facts and of our attitude towards them.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think there is anything more that can be said about that.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: If it is a completely different point of order.

Mr. Nellist: I do not intend to refer to the substance of any points raised, Mr. Speaker, but you will recall that, on a number of occasions, when a Minister of the Crown has responded to a point of order in this way, particularly on a second occasion as in this case—first to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and then to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir David Steel)—and given substantial answers at the Box——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nellist: No. Let me finish my point. You have treated——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows perfectly well that I invited the Leader of the House—for the benefit of the House—to state exactly what the position was. That was not a statement; it was for the benefit of the House. We have very important business in front of us, and I think we should now move on. I will take one final point of order: Mr. Tony Benn.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point relates not to you, Mr. Speaker, but to what the Leader of the House said. There is no doubt from television reports and from statements by the Prime Minister on television that the attack on Israel is taken gravely by the Government. The Leader of the House could well have said that he will make a statement tomorrow, in which case the matter would have been disposed of. He did make a statement—that he could not guarantee a statement. Therefore, you are inevitably brought into this, because it is your task to defend the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Benn: Please do not prevent me from making my submission.

Mr. Speaker: I know, but at great length. There are other ways of getting a statement. If the Government do not volunteer a statement, applications can be made to me.

Mr. Benn: I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow me to make a serious point on a day when great events have occurred, yet the Leader of the House has declined to give us an assurance that there will be a statement tomorrow. Apart from anything else, what has happened in Tel Aviv tonight is a threat to security under the United Nations charter. There can be no doubt about that, in the light of the Prime Minister's statement. All I ask is that the Leader of the House takes seriously the points that are being made and undertakes that, tomorrow, he will invite the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence or the Prime Minister to make a statement. All we are asking is that a statement be made tomorrow in the light of what has obviously happened.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. I was not seeking to be discourteous to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). If the Government do not make a statement, there are other means of obtaining information from the Government—applications made to me.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We have had enough of it. *[Interruption.]* Finally—Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Cohen: Back Benchers have the right to question the Executive, and that becomes more important, not less, in time of war. There should be a statement on important incidents such as happened today. I ask, through you, Mr. Speaker, as the custodian of Back Benchers' rights, that we have a statement every day in the House on the events of this war, so that Back Benchers have an opportunity to question the Government about them.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that will have been heard by those who are responsible.

European Standing Committees

Mr. Speaker: I have not selected amendment (a), but I have selected amendment (b) in the name of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), and amendments (c) and (d) in the name of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and his hon. Friends. I suggest that the two motions and all the amendments are debated together and, after one and a half hours or earlier, I shall invite the hon. Members concerned to move their amendments and divide the House on them if that is their wish.

10.38 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following Amendments be made to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees):

in paragraph (1), line 1, leave out 'three' and insert 'two';

in paragraph (3), line 15, leave out 'ten' and insert 'thirteen';

in paragraph (6), line 34, leave out 'several' and leave out the table following pargraph (6) and insert the following table:

European Standing Committees	*Principal subject matter*
	Matters within the responsibility of the following Departments—
A	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Transport; Environment; and Forestry Commission (and analogous responsibilities of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices);
B	Other Departments

I should like to start by explaining to the House why this matter has been brought before it for the second time in less than three months. On 24 October, the House debated and approved several amendments to Standing Orders. Those amendments were made in response to recommendations from the Select Committee on Procedure and were intended to improve our system of scrutiny of European Community legislation.

The main change agreed was the establishment of three new European Standing Committees, whose members would be appointed for a whole Session and in which scrutiny debates would be held.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does the Leader of the House accept that the Select Committee on Procedure recommended five Standing Committees, not three? It agreed to the Government's proposals only on the strict assurance that the Government would consider increasing the number.

Mr. MacGregor: The Procedure Committee proposed five Committees, but I should like to explain why I am bringing forward these proposals tonight.

Mr. Taylor: Please do.

Mr. MacGregor: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I have hardly started and I am coming to his point. We have only a brief time for the debate, so I would like to explain as quickly as possible the Government's attitude to the amendments.

Unfortunately, as hon. Members know, the Committees have not yet been appointed. The effect of that has been that since the start of the Session all scrutiny debates have had to be held on the Floor of the House, directly contrary to the Procedure Committee's intention that fewer debates should be held on the Floor of the House and more should be in Standing Committees. That point is highly relevant to another issue that has been raised with me by a considerable number of hon. Members on both sides of the House—the hours of the House and, in particular, late-night sittings.

Three months ago we ran into some difficulties about the composition of the Committees as originally agreed by the House. As it is a House matter and I was keen to proceed on an agreed basis, I engaged in further consultations. It is as a result of those that the Government have now revised some of the proposals which are the subject of this debate. I very much hope that those will find favour on both sides of the House as I am keen to put an end as soon as possible to the delay in establishing the new system for both the reasons that I gave.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In the opinion of the Leader of the House, is the division of responsibilities between Committees A and B a fair division of labour?

Mr. MacGregor: I am coming to that. It is the best division of labour that we can establish at this stage. I shall also make it clear that we shall review the position in the light of some experience of the working of the system.

The revised proposals are that, instead of three Standing Committees of 10 members each, there should be two Committees of 13 members each. Under the formula for having regard to the composition of the House, each Committee will comprise seven members from the Government side, five members from Her Majesty's Opposition, and one from the minority parties. The Chairman will come from the Chairmen's Panel.

As the Committees are subject-based—here I come to the hon. Gentleman's point—this change necessarily entails a reallocation of subject matter between the Committees. Standing Committee A, which under the original proposals dealt with agriculture, fisheries and food and environment, will now also cover transport. The second Standing Committee will include trade and industry with the other Departments already covered.

That is the extent of the Government proposals before the House today. The other motion on the Order Paper is in effect consequential on the main motion. It simply reallocates those documents which currently stand referred to one of three Standing Committees between the two Committees that we now propose. I recognise that, with only two European Standing Committees, there will be a heavier work load on each of them than under our earlier proposals. That is something that I shall monitor carefully, and at an appropriate time we might take stock. In the light of——

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps I may finish my sentence first. In the light of what the Procedure Committee recommended, the facts that it considered and the experience of the previous two parliamentary Sessions,

and making a judgment about the documents which are considered on the Floor of the House and those which go to a Standing Committee, it seems likely that each Standing Committee will have about two sittings per month. But that is a matter that we shall monitor.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for his explanation of these matters. Does he not find it ironic that, although certain hon. Members shrieked hysterically about the importance of scrutiny and thorough coverage of these matters, the generality of hon. Members on both sides of the House have shown so little interest in the exercise that it has been impossible to continue with the original plan and structure? Does he further agree that that also inevitably means that the Select Committee on European Legislation, of which I am a member—and of which other members are present on both sides of the House—will refer fewer matters for debate in the Standing Committees because of the reduced structure?

Mr. MacGregor: I have brought forward revised proposals, not because of lack of interest in the House but because, in the light of further consultations with various parties in the House, it seemed that that was the best way to proceed on the composition of the Committees and other matters.

I do not think that more will be taken on the Floor of the House. I have just given the type of work load that I think that Committees will have. The proposal will mean closer and more expert scrutiny of some of the documents that come before the House, because not only will the membership of the Committees be able to build up expertise over a period, but it will be posssible for any hon. Members with a particular interest in a document to participate in that Committee's work. Therefore, taking this step will enable those who wish to take an even closer interest. Under the proposal, the relevant Minister will be subjected to an hour of questions in the Committee before the one and a half hour discussion by the Committee. That is something not available to the House at present, which is why the steps will aid those many Members who take an interest in such matters.

Work load is one of the issues that we shall monitor carefully and, at the appropriate time, review.

Dr. Godman: Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. MacGregor: It would be better if I moved quickly now, because I want hon. Members, particularly those who have tabled amendments, to have the opportunity to make their case.

As there are only six months or so remaining in the current Session, I am anxious above all that the Committees should start their work as soon as possible, so that we can get some experience of how the new system works and also because the Committees will help to relieve the pressure for late-night debates on the Floor, as many hon. Members have been urging me to try to do in recent weeks.

It may be helpful to the House and assist our discussion if I now turn briefly to the amendments accepted for debate tonight. Amendment (b), tabled by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) proposes raising the quorum for the Committees from two to three. Since the Government are proposing increasing the size of the European Standing Committees, I recognise that it is reasonable to raise the quorum. I therefore propose that we accept the amendment.

Amendment (c), in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), seeks to give any hon. Member the right to propose amendments to motions debated in the Standing Committees, whether or not he or she has been nominated as a member of the Committee. I am advised that the amendment is unnecessary, because all hon. Members already have that right. The Standing Order says that those not nominated to the Committee may not vote, move a motion or be counted in the quorum, but it does not stop them from moving amendments to a motion. I hope that my clarification is helpful to my hon. Friend. I can reassure my hon. Friend that even if he or anyone else is not appointed to one of those Committees, he or any other hon. Member will be entitled to attend, speak, and move amendments. I hope that on that basis and with that reassurance my hon. Friend will be content to withdraw the amendment.

However, the Government cannot accept amendment (d), also in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East, which would completely change the character of the new Standing Committees. The Standing Committee meetings will allow the Committee members, and any other hon. Members who wish to attend as I have stressed more than once, to question the Minister and to participate in the debate thereafter. The Committee may also amend the motion before it. But there is no mechanism for it to arrive at a separate set of conclusions, and it would be quite wrong to expect any Standing Committee—as opposed to a Select Committee—to be able to do that. Such an arrangement could not be contemplated without re-drawing the whole system. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will not press the amendment, because I cannot accept it.

The new arrangements will allow more effective scrutiny in Committee, so it is crucial that they are now able to get under way and have a chance to work. The Government have undertaken to review the new arrangements at the end of the first Session of operation, and unless they are set up soon, there will be rather limited experience on which to base our review. I commend the motions and amendment (b), in the name of the hon. Member for Newham, South, to the House.

10.48 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I appreciate that the Government faced a dilemma and that, after consultation following the previous debate and votes on 24 October 1990, it became necessary to reconsider the matter, although I may have reservations about the conclusions drawn. After the detailed and worthy deliberations of the Procedure Committee and the alternative recommendations proposed, the House may be disappointed at the way in which the experiment has turned out. However, that sadness should not be allowed to delay the matter any further. The important thing is that the Committees be up and running as soon as possible so that we may be able to examine their effectiveness in the light of experience.

Although events outside this House—indeed, outside this country—preoccupy us, we should be conscious of the fact that we are considering matters that are of acute

[Mr. George Robertson]

importance to the country and to the future well-being of many of its people. That applies especially to European legislation.

I accept that we should now go ahead with this experiment. We must make it as successful as possible and, in the light of experience, come back to the matter, perhaps with guidance from the Select Committee. We might then consider whether there were better ways of proceeding.

The number of Committee members is not the important matter, nor is the subject matter to be dealt with; the important matter is the depth of scrutiny. All too often it is forgotten in the country that much of the European Community legislation that comes before this House—often obscured by technical descriptions—is primary legislation affecting the daily lives of citizens. We get excited, quite rightly, about primary legislation in the form of Bills, but we should recognise that European Community legislation can be just as important, and its implications just as direct.

The key to the success of these two Committees and of whatever results from their deliberations will be the opportunity to cross-examine Ministers in respect of their wide and pivotal role as European legislators. Indeed, the experiment will stand or fall by the ability of the Committees to make Ministers accountable in respect of that role. That being so, I want to put to the Minister questions about a number of matters that still puzzle me. He may care to return at the end of the debate to these matters.

Non-members will have the right to attend and now, the right to move amendments. What right will they have when it comes to questioning a Minister? Will priority be given to members? Will others be accorded equivalent rights during cross-examination? My particular reason for putting these questions is that I am concerned about the role of Front Benchers. It is not entirely clear to me whether Ministers will be full members of the Committees. If not, who will be responsible for the legislation? Currently, a Minister is responsible for each item of European legislation and has to steer it through. If the Minister is not to be a member, who will carry that responsibility? On that will hinge the role of Opposition Front-Bench members.

We should not lose sight of the fact that, as much European legislation is of a technical nature, the technical expertise of both Front Benches will be needed. I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify that important matter.

My second question is about the servicing of the Committees. We are creating a new organism. At the moment, we have Select Committees, the members of which are given an expert and able service by the Clerks Department, on an all-party basis, and that makes their effectiveness much sharper. We also have Standing Committees, in which, apart from the procedural aspect, all servicing is provided for Ministers and hon. Members of the party in government, and nothing is offered to the Opposition. How does the Leader of the House see the Clerks Department being involved in the servicing of the Committees? Will it be provided on a basis closer to that of the Select Committees than that of the Standing Committees?

In the sequence of cross-examination, will measures come before the Committees following recommendation from the Select Committee on European Legislation, or will there be opportunities for the wider issues, involving the subject matter of these Committees, to be debated, bringing Ministers before them? Will that be precluded by the Standing Order, or is it within the province of the Select Committee on European Legislation?

Having reduced the recommendation from five to three Committees and now to two, we are within one Committee of the concept of a European Grand Committee, put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and me in our evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure. It did not find favour in the Committee, but it is interesting that, in the practical world, we are almost down to that, although the suggested membership of 26 is too small to do justice to the concept that we designed.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office is already starting an initiative designed to consult Members of Parliament and others about various matters, and this should be welcome. We should not stop with one means of scrutiny, as this matter is of enormous importance. We should continue to look at ways in which the House can examine European legislation in much greater detail.

As a Member of Parliament representing a Scottish constituency, and knowing the strength of feeling in Scotland and among my colleagues representing Scottish constituencies about the fact that the Leader of the House is spending so much time trying to find a useful and relevant model of Committee to consider European legislation, I express my personal regret that we are now embarking on this experiment before forming the Scottish Select Committee, as the House has an obligation to do.

It is right and proper that we should be looking at the European experience and creating institutions to mirror its importance to the House and the country, but it is a scandal that we still have not managed to deal with the domestic problems foisted on the Leader of the House by his right hon. and hon. Friends. That means that the House of Commons still does not have that important Select Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. That has nothing to do with the matter before the House. I remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that we are discussing amendments to Standing Order No. 102, and his points have nothing to do with that.

Mr. Robertson: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that it was relevant to draw a contrast between the successful experiment and the failure. If you say that that is not in order, you must be right.

I draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying that while we may have regrets or reservations about the way in which the debate is going, it is the light of experience that will guide us. The sooner the experiment is up and running, the sooner we will have the facts on which to make a judgment.

11 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The proposals that the Government are advancing after the very short debate that we had on 24 October are an insult to the intelligence of the House of Commons and a grave insult to our democracy and our right to consider legislation.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House put forward only two arguments in favour of what he wants to do. First, he said that people were complaining about the late-night sittings on European legislation. I am sure that people do complain about having to come here after 10 o'clock, sometimes after midnight, to debate important Euro-issues, particularly when the public have not the slightest idea what is happening because tonight none of the organs of the press is present to hear what we are discussing. That may indeed have been one of the reasons.

If my right hon. Friend wishes to ensure that more Members pay more attention, if he wants the people of Britain to know what is going on, would it not be possible for the Government to have, say, one day a week to consider these vital Euro-measures? It is difficult to say that, because they are considered after 10 o'clock, we have to find another opportunity, when the Government know that they could take action in other ways.

The second matter is rather important. It concerns the way the Government have treated the issue in appointing two Committees. The Minister said that the original proposal was for three Committees. I have the pleasure of pointing out to him that the excellent Select Committee led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) had said that one needed five Committees to look at this issue. The Committee looked at the matter objectively, sat for a long time, and came to the conclusion that five Committees were needed to do this kind of work. The Government on reflection, having considered the matter, said no, they wanted three Committees. It seems that this was accepted reluctantly on the strict understanding that the Government would consider increasing the number. Now the Government have come back proposing just two Committees to consider a full range of desperately important legislation affecting every one of our constituents.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House explained that there had been consultations between the usual channels. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who is always helpful on these matters, said the reason was that nobody appeared to be interested in taking part. Who was consulted? I can assure the Leader of the House that, on the basis of those whom I know to be true democrats and who are interested in looking after the liberties of this country, I could have filled up five Committees simply by asking my friends. I would ask my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East whether anyone else in the House has been approached about this. Has my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who is sitting next to me, been asked? I am sure that she has not. Indeed, has anyone on this side been asked? Has anybody in the Labour party been asked?

Mrs. Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): May I ask the hon. Gentleman to make the same effort in relation to forming a Scottish Select Committee?

Mr. Taylor: There is certainly a case for having more of these Committees. Today we are discussing the European Committees, which examine legislation that affects us all. The repeal of legislation is also required.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I should put it on record that there were sufficient Members from the minority parties willing to take up the one place allocated to them on each of the Committees, to such an extent that some members of the minority parties were disappointed that they could not get on them.

Mr. Taylor: I can understand why some Members from the minority parties are disappointed. No doubt they have tried to serve on Committees. This is a sickening aspect. The House should be aware of the only occasion in my 25 years here when I asked to be a member of a Committee. I wrote asking to be on the Committee dealing with consumer protection because there were important matters affecting my constituents. The Minister knows to whom I wrote and that I regarded the matter as important. I was told that it was very sad but as there was a huge demand to attend that Committee, it was not possible to fit me in. Nevertheless, I went to the Committee and sat through every sitting. Three members came to me and said that they had been press-ganged to go onto it.

What sickens me is that, instead of this legislation, which vitally affects all our constituents, being properly considered by the House of Commons, it will be shoved into Committees, on to which no doubt once again Members will be press-ganged. To show balance, we shall probably have one of the delightful people from the Bruges group.

Dr. Godman: Given the customary sparseness of attendance at debates such as this, I find it difficult to believe that the hon. Gentleman could find enough right hon. and hon. Members to staff five Committees. Is he not being a little idealistic, and is there not much more sense in his proposal that one day a week should be devoted to EC matters?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is ridiculous to shove these matters into quiet Committees composed of people press-ganged into serving on them who will simply go bang, bang, bang and approve things. Everyone else will say that they know that the European legislation is important but because two important Committees are looking at the matters first they will switch off and say that they have done their democratic duty. If the Leader of the House wanted to ensure that the British people knew what was going on, if he wanted to ensure that democracy would be preserved, he could have allowed one day a week to discuss these measures in prime time so that people would know about them.

Mr. Haselhurst: Is not my hon. Friend overlooking the fact that any hon. Member is entitled to attend the Committees, so if his view is correct, a whole gang of people could turn up, play a full part and carry out the scrutiny that they felt might not be carried out by those officially appointed?

Mr. Taylor: That is the most ridiculous argument that I have ever heard. My hon. Friend says that any Member can go along, and the Leader of the House says that any amendment can be moved, but I am not sure exactly how that will be done when other amendments will no doubt be pressed. Will all hon. Members be able to go along and have status without the ability to vote or to take a meaningful part in the discussions? How will we be notified of such Committees? Has my hon. Friend ever looked at Euro-legislation? There are 30 documents awaiting consideration now. Is it suggested that every hon. Member

[Mr. Taylor]

will go to the Table of the House, get all that information and look at it? My hon. Friend knows that all we are doing under this proposal is switching off.

If my hon. Friend doubts that, he should consider what has happened under the leadership of the Leader of the House to hon. Members' ability to get information. The Leader of the House was formerly a Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I am sure that he looked after farmers well. In the old days, we had food mountains and people asked questions about them. Happily, because of a Conservative initiative, they were wiped out. Now, unfortunately they are going up again, and people might want to know about that.

If any hon. Member tables a question today about the size of the food mountains he will find that, instead of being given an answer, he is referred to the database in the Library—a new development, which simply means that the information is not made available to the public. The database people will then say that there are different ways of looking at the matter. What about the trade figures? They are very important to our democracy. Last year and the year before, we used to be able to ask questions about trade with Germany or the EC. Try doing that today. Again, hon. Members will be referred to the database.

What really worries me, as every hon. Member here tonight must know, is that all these vital issues affecting all our constituents, important issues about the control of EC spending, will simply be referred to two quiet Committees and everyone else will be able to switch off. That is terribly wrong.

I have tabled an amendment which I thought might be helpful. If those public-spirited Committees are to look at all the legislation, they might want to tell us something. For example, they might think that an agricultural policy document was heading us for a crisis. They might take the view that the law was not being observed. They might take the view that proposals on equal treatment for men and women would create a problem for British industry. How would they make their views known? The Minister said that that would not arise in a Standing Committee because detailed amendments are moved, proposals are put forward and arguments are made. The core Committees cannot move amendments to European legislation. They do not have the same power at all.

What on earth is wrong, after the Committees have deliberated for two or three months, in their saying that they have come to certain conclusions about which they want the House to know? What on earth is wrong with that when these are not normal Standing Committees?

We are doing a shameful thing tonight. The Leader of the House may remember that, on 24 October, this motion and four others were discussed for one hour. Mr. Speaker told the Government that, if they felt that the time available was too short, they did not have to move all the motions. Now we are having a debate again at a time when no one will be aware of it, in which we are simply saying that this mass of legislation will go to two Committees which will have to cover all their work—an impossible load, considering that we have been told that we ought to have five Committees to cope with it. I honestly believe that what we are doing tonight is shameful. It means that we can all switch off. It takes away our role in examining legislation.

We know that European legislation is not always considered on its merits. Sometimes there is horse trading. We have a duty to let people know what is happening.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): If the Executive suggested that legislation emanating from the Government rather than from Brussels should be treated in this way, the idea would be laughed out of court.

Mr. Taylor: That is so, as the Minister knows. Things happen in fishing, but what can he do about it? What questions can he ask? We do not have the right to switch off. Most of us will forget about this; we do not need to trouble about it any more. We do not need to ask ourselves whether it is our duty to come along at 10 o'clock to talk about these matters. We have a social charter. We did not sign it, but, as hon. Members know, all the matters are going through under the Single European Act and it will affect every firm in our constituencies. Do we not have a duty to offer advice? We have that duty, and if we are to be fair to our constituents, we must therefore consider this matter.

We should reject the motion and ask the Government to give us a day—any day of the week—when we can discuss these issues, and not after 10 o'clock at night. We must tell the Government to stop encouraging us to switch off, and to stop preventing the people of Britain from knowing what is happening. The Government must stop the conspiracy of silence which is almost becoming part of Government policy, as the Leader of the House well knows. Let us reject this ridiculous proposal and have a day to discuss the important issues which affect us all.

11.12 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg to move amendment (b). On behalf of the Scrutiny Committee, I thank the Leader of the House——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but it would be inappropriate for him to move his amendment now in the light of the advice given by Mr. Speaker. It might be more appropriate for him to move it at the end of the debate.

Mr. Spearing: I apologise for that procedural slip. Sometimes one sees in *Hansard* such words that are not actually said, so I thought that I would say them. I will nod at the appropriate moment at the end of the debate.

I was about to thank the Leader of the House for his gracious acceptance on behalf of the Committee. I shall show in a moment how amendment (b) reveals some of the difficulties to which he alluded, but before I do so, I should make one or two points about the speech by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). I understand his concern, but I think that the forebodings are rather different and are shared by Members on both sides of the Scrutiny Committee, and not simply by those with one particular view of the European Community.

For the past 15 years it has been up to any hon. Member of the House to attend such Committees, and unless the Standing Orders have been changed—I do not think they have—any hon. Member can move amendments. Amendments can also be moved when the matter comes back to the Floor of the House, albeit forthwith. If the amendment is selected, there can be a Division.

It is up to the hon. Member and his hon. Friends to go to Committees and to table amendments which take a view

of the document concerned. Those amendments can be accepted on the merits of their effect on particular constituencies, and can result in a motion on the Floor of the House. Indeed, for the first hour, an hon. Member can question the Minister on that document. That is the main feature of improvement in this package.

Having said that, the package—apart from the hour for questions, on which we are all agreed—is a step backwards. The Select Committee thought the same. The idea of having a quorum of three for a Committee of 13 illustrates my argument. Such a small quorum would show that something was wrong.

We told the previous Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) that the changing of the polarity or automaticity of putting everything in Committee unless moved by a Minister of the Crown on the Floor of this Chamber was risky and taking things too far. In particular, instead of having one-off Committees as we do now—horses for courses, chosen by the Selection Committee—we are to impose an extraordinary load on the members of two Committees, or of the five Committees originally proposed by the Procedure Committee, whose Chairman may catch your eye shortly, Mr. Speaker. We are not clear about better scrutiny in toto, because there will be two eyes to the needle, which will be restrictive to some extent.

Whatever views right hon. and hon. Members may have on the merits of the proposal, they should be aware of the question of publicity, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Southend, East. The Leader of the House will correct me if I am wrong, but I recall that his predecessor gave an undertaking that the Thursday business statement would contain an additional statement on the Committees due to sit the following week. Let us hope that the media, who are rather variable in their attendance at Committees, will publicise that information. It would also appear on the Order Paper, which would serve to inform right hon. and hon. Members, who could enter the dates in their diaries. That would be of added help, and it is a pity that that procedure is not followed already.

We may sometimes think that Bills are complicated, but they have a logical order. However, some legislation is not easily understood at first sight. There might appear in the middle of a document a table containing an alteration that could have an enormous impact on an individual industry, firm, or type of crop, yet that might not be immediately discernible. That is why the Scrutiny Committee attempts to report to the House the likely impact that such a proposal might have, without necessarily saying whether we think it is good or bad.

The Government's new procedures will be improvements only in so far as the questioning of Ministers is concerned. With television coverage and improved publicity, it is just possible that it may offer a net advantage over the existing conventions. However, I sense that there will still be personnel problems. The Select Committee on European Legislation expressed concern about that aspect right from the start. We conveyed that concern to the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. The Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Proceedure, Cmd. 1081 of May 1990, stated, in recommendation 19, in respect of the recommendation for five Committees that

"it would be difficult to find sufficient Members with the relevant interest or expertise to man five Special Standing Committees. The Government therefore propose initially that three Special Standing Committees should be established".

We know that proposal has run into trouble.

When the Leader of the House undertakes the review promised by his predecessor, I hope that he will consider not just the procedure that may operate in Committee in respect of questions and the attendance, no doubt, of the hon. Member for Southend, East and his hon. Friends, but the question of membership. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) has indicated his interest, as have other noble volunteers, in serving on such Committees in order that the necessary quorum can be reached.

I am not sure that it would redound to the credit of the House if 20 or 30 right hon. and hon. Members turned up at such a Committee and, quite rightly, started questioning the Minister and he failed to give satisfactory answers. Is that not what Parliament is all about? The Minister then runs to earth in some foxhole, people literally jump up and down, and the Chair must maintain order. Then the Question is put, and it is carried by two votes to one. Imagine how that would look on television. I am not saying that that will happen, but under the present Standing Orders it is possible.

Perhaps in the review we should consider not merely what has happened, but what could happen. I advocate consideration of the idea of a one-off Committee for each batch of documents—we try to batch them together so that we can get through a lot of them as efficiently and effectively as possible. If these Committees work reasonably well, the Selection Committee may not run into the sort of timetable and selection troubles that they have run into so far. I hope that that is true, because, when questioned by our colleagues in the EEC, we have already had to admit that, as a Committee, we had the power to make recommendations on the Floor of the House or in Committee and the Government accepted that but the power of the Committee to make recommendations has now gone.

Until these amendments are made, there will be a decision at 3.30 pm on whether the Committee is held on the Floor of the House or upstairs. That decision will now lie wholly with the Government. In another Parliament, or if there is a balance of hon. Members on a particular document, it will be possible for a number of hon. Members to stand up and ensure that the matter is dealt with on the Floor of the House. These may not necessarily be party political matters, or anything to do with the merits of the EC establishment.

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Spearing: I shall be courteous and give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman is a great expert in his field. Can he tell the House how wide a trawl there was in his party about whether it was possible to man three Committees as opposed to two? I and other Conservative Members are not sure why there was a sudden change of mind from three Committees to two. Was it because there were not enough Opposition Members to man the Committees and if so, can the hon. Gentleman throw some light on that?

Mr. Spearing: I have no knowledge about that. The difficulties about numbers were foreseen by the Select Committee on European Legislation. We have been monitoring what Committees have been doing for 15 years. The hon. Member for Stockport, and various other hon. Members, considered the problem and foresaw the difficulties, which may or may not be within one party. Perhaps there would be such difficulties under any Government and with any Opposition. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's question is relevant to me, or that it tackles the real problem, which is whether all Committees are made up of volunteers to make up the necessary quorum, or whether Committees are selected for the job in hand. I should have thought that, in principle, and wherever possible, the House would have preferred the latter.

We look forward to supporting these new arrangements, although they fall short and, in some respects, step backwards. Let us hope that experience will enable the House, at some future date, after the review and possible further adjustments, to take two steps forward.

11.23 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Please excuse me if I croak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have a rather severe cold.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, has tabled the amendment about the quorum. I should have had great pleasure in supporting it with him, and I am delighted that his wisdom has persuaded the Government to move in that direction.

I welcome the desire of both the Government and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), that the Committees should be up and running as soon as possible.

The wisdom of the House must obviously be greater than the judgment of the Select Committee, but if the House is to adopt the Government's recommendations tonight—these Committees need to start working in some form or another—we should study some of the bases upon which the recommendations were made by the Select Committee, as they are being overlooked.

When the Procedure Committee suggested that there should be five Committees rather than one large Grand Committee, as suggested by the hon. Member for Hamilton and his colleagues, we were keen to establish a number of points. First, we wanted to ensure the involvement of specialists—people with a specific interest in the subjects with which the Committees would deal—and also of volunteers who would be willing to spend at least a year considering such issues.

We judged that, if a host of subjects were dealt with by a single Committee, the volunteers would not be interested; the establishment of five Committees to deal with agriculture, trade and industry, Treasury, customs and excise, transport and the environment, would attract specialist volunteers, and we would not have to incorporate pressed men.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Would the specialists include MEPs? As fellow parliamentarians, they are interested, as we are, in the procedures of democratic scrutiny.

Sir Peter Emery: We did not make such a recommendation, because giving MEPs exactly the same role as British Members of Parliament would mean changing the whole structure of the constitution of the House of Commons. The approach of the Procedure Committee is fairly pragmatic: we try to make recommendations that have a chance of being accepted by the House, rather than recommendations which may in theory be desirable but which would fall at the first hurdle.

We were also anxious not to give the Committees too much work. That may sound strange, but we wanted to attract volunteers. Paragraph 68 of volume I, dealing with the scrutiny of European legislation in the Session 1988-89, suggested that no Committee would have to meet more than about 10 times a year. We thought that even busy Members of Parliament could be persuaded to volunteer, and to take an interest in the subjects with which they were dealing. We gave consideration to the questions of expertise, numbers, work load and the time that would have to be spent; we believed that a link could be established between the departmentally oriented Select Committees and the European Standing Committees, with a member of, say, the Agriculture, Treasury or Transport Select Committee also serving on a European Committee.

In the debate before Christmas, the Government suggested starting the experiment with three Committees rather than five. I said then that we would go along with that, but suggested that, if it did not seem to be working, we should have the option of returning to the original idea. What worries me is the likelihood that we shall not achieve the degree of specialisation that we want, that the work load will be too heavy and that the desired relationship with the departmental Select Committees will not be achieved. All those factors may well mean the failure of the experiment. That worries me very much indeed.

Mr. Favell: May I ask my hon. Friend whether he has had any explanation of why the Government are now moving from three Committees to two?

Sir Peter Emery: I am afraid that that is a question that the Government must answer, not the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure. I know of no other reason than those given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House this evening.

We will therefore have two Committees which are really quite different from those envisaged by the Procedure Committee. Having said that, I want to return to what I said at the beginning, that it is better to get some Committees up and running and to deal with this matter rather than to delay it any further.

May I therefore ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, when he replies to the debate, to restate his assurance that, at the end of the Session, in the summer or perhaps in October——

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): It seems to me that what my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is suggesting is that the membership of these Committees could usefully be much larger. There should then be a rule that not more than a certain number could sit at any one time. This would allow the specialists to be called in on specialist subjects. Would this not be one way of dealing with the very real problem that my hon. Friend has outlined?

Sir Peter Emery: I partly follow what my hon. Friend has said: that is another line of approach, and not one

taken by the Procedure Committee. As I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, I will not go down that particular valley at the moment.

I would, however, ask my right hon. Friend to give us an absolute assurance that, at the end of the summer, when we have seen some of the work of these Committees, he will look at them again, because when we compare two Committees of 13 members each, making 26 in all, with three Committees of 10 members each, making only 30 members in all, the membership argument seems to be slightly weak—although I accept that there may be some problems with the division of members of the Committees as regards the different parties in the House. We need the absolute assurance that, if this experiment appears not to be working as well as it might, the whole concept will not be rejected, because we have moved so far from what was originally recommended by the Procedure Committee.

11.32 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Both the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) and the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) put a very difficult question tonight concerning the quality and quantity of consultations which had taken place within the parties about the membership of these committees. It may be the case that the only party which has had such a series of discussions is the Liberal party—and, characteristically, its Members are absent from this debate. I have not been involved in any such consultations, and that is a problem common to both major parties in the House, whatever may have happened in some smaller parties.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): In reply to the hon. Member's query, I can say that there has been full consultation with all the minority parties, including the SLD.

Dr. Godman: I am pleased to hear that. I look forward to regular attendance by these hon. Members at the Committee meetings. That will be the proof of the pudding when it comes to their interest.

Initially, I sympathised with the idea of five. Committees, but I just cannot believe that we could find in this place the hon. Members with the qualifications outlined by an earlier speaker. In my seven and a half years in the House, I have always noted the sparse attendance at these debates.

While I have some sympathy for the proposal by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that we devote a day each week to European Community matters, I still do not believe that there would be a large attendance unless we were dealing with controversial issues. There is still massive indifference here to the European Community, despite the fact that we now have in Brussels, among other things, a supreme court where the English and Scottish legal systems are covered, and that this House, along with the other 11 national legislatures in the EC, cannot impose upon the decision-makers in Brussels the necessary democratic checks and restraints.

All hon. Members, whether pro-integration or anti-integration, should be demanding checks and balances to be instituted formally in this House and in the other 11 legislatures. Failure to do that will accelerate the continuing diminution of power. We should be doing something about that. I am not speaking as someone who detests the European Community. In my part of Scotland, we have benefited considerably from some Brussels decisions, but it is essential for us to acquire the power to which I have referred.

The proposal for five Committees is a fine ideal but utterly unattainable, given the massive indifference to which I have referred. We should be talking of three Committees. Again, that might be a difficult objective to achieve.

Earlier, I asked the Leader of the House about the fair division of labour between the two Committees. Considering the spread of responsibilities, I have difficulty in accepting the provisions on the qualifications of members. I suspect that members will be chosen on an ad hoc basis and that there will not be tough selection criteria for membership.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked the Leader of the House about the precedence to be given to hon. Members in the questioning of Ministers. That privilege should be given to the members of the Committee. If it is not, come a controversial subject and the appearance of a Minister to be cross-examined, hon. Members who are assiduous attenders of sessions may be pushed to one side by a gang of hon. Members who are anxious to be picked up by the television cameras.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Privy Councillors.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend suggests Privy Councillors. Priority must be given to members of the Committee.

For the reasons already outlined, I sincerely hope that the two Committees are a success in the very important work which they have to carry out on behalf not only of the House and its largely indifferent Members but of the people whom we represent in our constituencies.

11.38 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I strongly support the Leader of the House in his motion tonight, because I want to see the House scrutinise European legislation far more effectively than it has tried to do in the past. I make common cause with my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on that point. How many times have I sat in this Chamber when we have had the late night debate about which he has complained and said that the whole process was a farce?

There will, of course, be problems with the new Standing Committees. I should like to go further than the proposals we have tonight. I have always thought that these Committees should have their own Chairmen rather than these being drawn from the Chairman's Panel. That would give them greater coherence and enable them to have a much bigger public impact, just as Select Committees are having a bigger public impact.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East was crude enough, perhaps, to say that some people would be press-ganged to serve on these Committees. I have certainly made it known to certain people that I should be very happy to serve, and I think that others would do the same. But there would be a problem here. You would quickly rule me out of order if I referred to last night's debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there is a problem about manning the Committees of the House which has perhaps been ignored up to now. Without going into details, perhaps some hon. Members were rather surprised to find

[Mr. David Harris]

themselves being nominated for a particular Select Committee, possibly in contravention of Standing Order 104. I will not weary the House or labour the point, but there is a problem.

I therefore think that the proposal before the House tonight that we should have two Standing Committees, although I would like to see three, is a realistic one.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend think it is a good idea that members of the EC Scrutiny Committee should not be members of these two Standing Committees, even if they choose from time to time to attend them?

Mr. Harris: I am quite happy with the present proposal to exclude them, because they are not being debarred from giving these new Standing Committees the benefit of their considerable experience. I envisage a situation in which, for example, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, given his intense interest in these issues, will come along to one of the Standing Committees and make known his views and the views of his Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is absolutely right: we have not got a perfect situation by reducing the number of Standing Committees to two, but it is a darn sight better that what we have had up to now, and I think that the House, at the end of this debate, should give the authority for the establishment of those two Committees and let them make a good job, in spite of all the difficulties, of the very important task in front of them.

11.43 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will take careful note of what is being said in the debate, because he is acute enough to realise that there is a degree of questioning right across the House about whether we are anywhere near getting our procedures right for scrutiny in all its aspects.

I want this proposal to go forward tonight. It is more modest than I would have liked and I think that, if it is to work, and if we are to have confidence in the improvement of scrutiny, a great deal of good will is required on all sides. Good will is needed on the part of hon. Members, to attend if they are appointed to these Committees and if scrutiny is to be effective. Good will is also needed on the part of members of the Scrutiny Committee itself to ensure that we are operating in the right spirit in the recommendations that we make as to where debates should take place.

It requires good will from the Government to recognise unease in the House. Major issues may arise from documents that merit debate on the Floor of the House. Were the Government to take a restrictive view of the number of documents that could be considered on the Floor of the House following a recommendation by the Select Committee, it would create some dismay among hon. Members. We must try to achieve the right balance. I hope that the Government will be prepared to experiment and quickly reconsider the proposal if it does not appear to be working out.

The debate has been enlarged from the modest proposal that is before us. The proposal is worth supporting if it is seen as only a start. It is at least an improvement and I am glad to speak in support of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) who is my Chairman in the Select Committee on European Legislation. It should be better to have a Committee that has continuity than one that is appointed ad hoc to consider particular documents, and it will have the added benefit of being able to question a Minister about a document. The mechanism to improve scrutiny is available. Much will depend on the good will of hon. Members who are appointed to do the job properly and in the right spirit.

There has been a credibility gap floating like a bubble over the debate on whether hon. Members will be prepared to do their duty in carrying out scrutiny on behalf of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and his 149 friends, if he is to be believed, must be a stock that can be drawn on. Is there, by contrast, some doubt among hon. Members that the reality of attendance at debates in the Chamber and in Committee is not always what it should be? There is no point in deluding ourselves. As one or two of my hon. Friends have pointed out, much as we complain about the system, we have not always distinguished ourselves in operating the systems that are available to us.

Some adverse comment has been made about tonight's attendance, but it would do credit to some debates held earlier in the day. It has been a thoughtful debate, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will take it in the right spirit and will be prepared to see it as a further chapter, and not the last word, in the way in which the House deals with scrutiny.

11.46 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). To some extent, that indicates the natural wish of hon. Members of the Select Committee on European Legislation, of which he is a member—its Chairman, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), like the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), has contributed to the debate—that this experiment should be successful. That is important, and not for the ironic result of trying to apply strict and more profound scrutiny to EC legislation than to domestic legislation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden implied, it is somewhat suprising and ironic to reflect that, on major financial legislation, the House can vote billions of pounds of new Government expenditure and Supply with only a few hon. Members paying the slightest attention, while a Commission proposal costing a couple of million ecu produces an over-excited reaction from more hon. Members, as if yet another act of rape is taking place by European Community institutions of the hapless British body politic. We must keep that in perspective.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee agree with the recommendation of the Procedure Committee and are particularly anxious that the new Select Committees succeed. We share the disappointment that has been expressed that it is a watered-down and reduced structure, although we acknowledge that the Leader of the House and his predecessor did their best in trying to get this together.

I was intrigued by the remarks of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that members of the two Committees would be selected ad hoc. I surmised that he meant Members in the Tea Room who

could not get out of the door before being pounced on and having their name added to the list. I assume that the selections that are made through the usual channels, in sophisticated conversations and consultations, are more scientific and subtle than that. *[Interruption.]* Some of my hon. Friends suggest that that is not the way in which we will work. I am disappointed, because we should have a Parnassian procedure to achieve the right composition of the two Committees.

Although he rejected the affectionate overtures of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was wrong to assume that we do not share his objectives. That is where hon. Members from both sides of the House and from different parties come together. It is not true that those who have a slight sceptism at the margins about some elements of our membership of the Community—if I can put the attitude of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East in that way—are the only people who are enthusiastic about thorough and profound scrutiny.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dykes: Not for the moment, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

I know that my hon. Friend wants to have thorough scrutiny because he wants to improve the Community's legislation and make us a stronger and more integrated member of it. Thorough scrutiny is a common objective of all Members of Parliament.

In a way, we are burdened with the original, somewhat artificial, constitutional political objective. Scrutiny was introduced for different reasons from ours. We are now lumbered—if that is the right word to use—with a procedure which is on some occasions too profound for the material under consideration, if that is not too much of an irony.

Mr. Ron Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dykes: May I continue for a moment?

Precisely because of the original objective, we must make the Committees work. Therefore, it is essential that members of the Committees—and those who are not members, when they choose to attend—do not attend only for the ministerial interrogation and then disappear. I hope that a good number of people will attend, especially if the Committees are televised and broadcast, which would be a good thing.

If members disappear for the rest of the sittings of the Committees, the Committees will be like Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, which hon. Members attend to do their correspondence and leave as soon as possible. There is sometimes a game to see how short the Committee can be. Everyone then agrees that the Statutory Instrument has been considered. If that happens, the Committees will be run down and will not have the significance that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and his colleagues wished when they drew up the procedures.

At least the suggestions of the Committee on the European Standing Committees were taken up by the official channels in the office of the Leader of the House more quickly than other suggestions made by the Procedure Committee over the years. That is a good sign, but it is an uneasy mixture. It is as uneasy as the mess with the telephones. We are still waiting for the office of the Leader of the House to respond on that matter. I do not want him and his colleagues to rush excessively, but we have been discussing it for five years. It is a recklessly short period, but people are gradually coming to the conclusion that if possible—the engineers tell us that it can be achieved and they do not rush to conclusions either—we should have dedicated lines so that we can interrogate officials in the Commission and elsewhere, both British and foreign—although, of course, it is more difficult and dangerous when one is talking to foreigners—about aspects of proposed and putative Community legislation. That would also be good for the members of the Committees.

11.52 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I preface my remarks by saying that I am one of the people who abhor the concept of the European Community loading our already overburdened legislative programme with many more regulations, which, if the Community has its way, will set in concrete almost every aspect of our national and private lives. I am torn between examining this stuff in detail in several Committees, or doing as the French do—nodding it through and then operating it to suit ourselves—or as the Italians do—nod it through and then ignore it. But we always like to do things properly in this country, so we must examine this stuff and in some respects modify it. I entirely support my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) in his desire that it be properly scrutinised.

I am worried by the idea that we should staff the Committees with experts. It was suggested that the reason why we could not have as many Committees as originally planned is that we cannot find enough experts. Heaven forbid that we should have these regulations, which are bureaucratic nightmares, scrutinised by teams of experts. Surely the whole concept of this place is that it should be a jury of everyman, putting a common-sense view of what the legislature would thrust on us.

Dr. Godman: I must have explained myself in an obscure way. I am cynical enough to believe that we would never find enough volunteers for three Committees, let alone five.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am one of a number of people present to whom the idea of serving on the Committees has never been mentioned. It may well be that I am known for my temperamental dislike of Committees, which take up a great deal of our time when we might be more usefully occupied, but I support the idea that there should be an opportunity for those of us with particular concerns to go and discuss them at some length.

The most interesting point to be raised in the debate, apart from the informative description of the Procedure Committee's idea that we should have five Committees, was the remark made by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who proposed a Grand Committee. Perhaps he can say whether the Government's inability to proceed with the Procedure Committee's suggestion has something to do with Opposition Members pushing for a Grand Committee. By failing to co-operate with the idea of producing enough Members for the Committees, perhaps the hon. Member for Hamilton is actually trying to move towards one Grand Committee to consider the enormous amount of legislation. If that were so, would he not agree

[Mrs. Gorman]

that the Grand Committee would have to sit as often and as long as the House to pay proper attention to the amount of legislation that the European Community puts our way?

Mr. Robertson: I do not think that this is the time or place—particularly not the time—for a lengthy debate on the idea of a European Grand Committee, which I think is sound. However, for the sake of accuracy and so that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) can return to other aspects of her speech, the Grand Committee proposal is not the reason why the Leader of the House is here today with his suggestion for two Committees. That was not the motivation behind the workings of the usual channels.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. As my hon. Friends have suggested in their interventions, I am still intrigued to know how the Government came to their conclusion that two Committees were enough. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will say whether there must be 13 people on the Committees or whether, instead, there could be three Committees of eight, nine or even seven, especially as the quorum is only three, presumably the Minister, the Opposition spokesman and A. N. Other—[HON. MEMBERS: "The Whip."]—and the Whip. All those details have yet to be made clear, and I am concerned that the Government should pay due attention to the need to scrutinise the information adequately.

Mr. Favell: My hon. Friend has addressed the issue of the number of Committees, which is important, and I have asked about it. Will she consider amendment (d), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on the necessity of the Committees, no matter how many of them there are, reporting back to the House? If they do not, the power will not lie with the scrutineers, but with those who choose them. The power will be with the people who decide the make-up of the Committees, rather than with the House, and the power of the House will be taken away.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend makes his point perfectly well. I will not continue with my remarks, as I see my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House anxiously looking at the clock, but I hope that, when he winds up, he will make clear the reasons for the Government's decision, as I am not clear what their motives really are.

11.58 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I shall make three quick points. First, I support my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) in his disquiet at the choice of Chairman for the Committees. They would benefit greatly from permanent Chairmen, not ones chosen ad hoc from the Chairman's Panel. There has been plenty of talk about that, so I will not pursue the matter, but I believe that there is a need for permanent Chairmen.

The automaticity of the proposed procedure will make it very difficult for the House to intervene, despite the fact that very serious issues, with political ramifications, ought to be discussed on the Floor of the House. The report-back situation, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), is very important. If one of the Committees disagreed with the position that a Minister intended to take at the Council of Ministers, a difficult situation would arise. It would be very difficult indeed to proceed with a measure with which Parliament disagreed.

Lastly, I want to know how a Minister, having been ignored or defeated by the Council of Ministers, would report to the House.

12.1 am

Mr. MacGregor: In the few remaining minutes, I shall respond to as many points as possible.

This has been a very interesting debate. I am glad that so many of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members support—albeit sometimes with reservations—the course on which we are embarked.

My hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) all agree that it is right to get on with these proposals, as they represent a considerable improvement. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives that scrutiny will be improved and intensified. I am grateful for his support.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked whether non-members of the two Committees would be able to question Ministers and, if so, what priority their questions would have. Indeed they will be able to put questions. The degree of priority will probably lie with the Committee Chairmen. No doubt the Committees will evolve their own ethos. The hon. Gentleman asked whether Ministers would be full members. No, they will not. However, they will be questioned in the hour's session, and they will be able to sum up and respond to points in the normal way.

The servicing of these Committees—another point that the hon. Member raised—will be similar to that of other Standing Committees. Indeed, these will be Standing Committees, not Select Committees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) raised a number of points, with which I shall deal as quickly as possible. He made several critical comments about the number of hon. Members involved. I repeat that any hon. Member will be entitled to attend and participate in Committee meetings. Clearly, Members will want to hear the debates on documents in which they are interested. Scrutiny of documents will be longer than it is under the present arrangements.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden wondered just how many Members would attend for some of these scrutiny operations. Their doubts may well be justified: that is why we set the quorum at a reasonable level. I hope that we are wrong; I hope that 149 of the colleagues of my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden will attend each Committee meeting. We shall have to wait and see, but I doubt it very much. Certainly we are providing more opportunity for participation. In any case, this is one of the matters that may be subject to review in the light of experience.

The hon. Gentleman made a great deal of the point that this would not enable the House to examine European issues. Indeed, he went way beyond the documents, to deal with such issues as agricultural surpluses. The House, he said, would not be able to examine these matters sufficiently closely. He knows as well as I do that there are many other means of addressing wider issues. They can, for instance, be dealt with by Select Committees and on the

Floor of the House, as is done pretty frequently. For instance, on Thursday we shall have an all-day debate on the important subject of economic and monetary union.

It is a substantial misrepresentation of the situation to suggest that the major European issues will be dealt with solely by these Committees, or that the House's general scrutiny of European matters will be confined. Far from it—the Committees will be concerned with particular European Community documents that the Select Committee recommends for further consideration. The documents that are most important politically will still be taken on the Floor of the House.

I spent about four years attending intense debates in the Council of Agriculture Ministers and I experienced the decision taking, the policy making and everything else. The House probably scrutinises most of the European proposals more than most, if not all, of the other European legislatives. This is a great help to Ministers, and I believe that this proposal will be an even greater help. The Minister who has been questioned and has listened to views for an hour and, following that, to a debate for an hour and a half in Committee, will have his hand strengthened for when he goes to the Council of Ministers, because he will have a greater knowledge of the views taken by Parliament. That opinion is based on my experience.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) knows, in the Council of Ministers, decisions are often taken on a majority basis, and if we cannot make our view prevail on any issue, there is not a great deal that the scrutiny Committees can do. It was never intended that these Committees would deal with that issue.

I confirm to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) that I intend to announce forthcoming Committee debates in the weekly Business Questions. That will strengthen the position of the Committees, and will alert hon. Members who are not on the Committees to what will happen, and enable them to adjust their diaries accordingly. As he rightly said, it will also bring the Committees more publicity.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) raised, both in an intervention to me and in his own speech, a point about the division of the subjects between the two Committees. This is also something that can be adjusted in the light of experience, and each session will be different. In the last Session, 23 scrutiny debates would have fallen to Committee A, and 19 to Committee B, so I hope that we shall get balance right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has great knowledge of these matters, so I listened to his speech with great interest. I accept that the Committees that we are proposing are different from those proposed by the Procedure Committee, of which he is Chairman. There can be a number of views about how we set up these Committees, and about their membership.

I hope that the fact that any hon. Member will be able to come to these Committees—I keep stressing this point because it is an important feature—will mean that some of the worries about their being simply confined to the 13 members of each Committee will be overcome. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that it is better to get the Committees up and running so that we get the experience, because they are an improvement on the present system. I am also grateful for all the work that he and his Committee have done in enabling us to get to this point.

I am happy to restate my assurance that I am prepared to review this at the end of the Session—a point about which my hon. Friend asked. Many of the hon. Members here tonight will wish to express their views in the light of the experience of the next six months. I hope that we can get on with these Committees so that we can gain that experience.

Amendment made: (b), after 'thirteen', insert

'in paragraph (4), line 24, leave out "two" and insert "three".'.—*[Mr. Spearing.]*

Amendment proposed: (d), at end add

'in paragraph (8), line 65, at the end add "The Committee shall also have power to report to the House its conclusions on any matter arising out of its consideration of documents referred to it under the provisions of the Order."'.—*[Mr. Teddy Taylor.]*

The House proceeded to a Division; but no Member being willing to act as Teller for the Ayes, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it.*

Amendment negatived.

It being more than one and a half hours after the motion was entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [18 January], to put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion, as amended, and of the motion relating to European Community documents.*

Ordered,

That the following Amendments be made to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees):

in paragraph (1), line 1, leave out 'three' and 'two';

in paragraph (3), line 15, leave out 'ten' and insert 'thirteen';

in paragraph (4), line 24, leave out 'two' and insert 'three';

in paragraph (6), line 34, leave out 'several' and leave out the table following pargraph (6) and insert the following table:

European Standing Committees	*Principal subject matter*
	Matters within the responsibility of the following Departments—
A	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Transport; Environment; and Forestry Commission (and analogous responsibilities of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices);
B	Other Departments

Ordered,

That—

(1) European Community Document No. 6701/90, relating to pollution from diesel engines, which stands referred to European Standing Committee B, shall instead stand referred to European Standing Committee A; and

(2) the following Documents which stand referred to European Standing Committee C shall instead stand referred to European Standing Committee B:

European Community Documents Nos. 8353/90, relating to customs controls on baggage, 8073/90, relating to organisation of working time, 9025/90, relating to nuclear fusion research, 6703/88, relating to burden of proof in the area of equal pay and treatment for men and women, 8461/88, relating to import duties on weapons and military equipment, 8162/90, relating to procurement procedures of water, energy, transport and telecommunications undertakings, 8075/90 relating to safety on temporary work sites, 8792/90, relating to protection of pregnant women at work, 8460/90, relating to protection of individuals in relation to processing of personal

data in the Community and information security, 10149/90, relating to the promotion of energy efficiency in the Community, and the Commission Report on the benefits and costs of economic and monetary union.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Jeff Rooker be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and that Mr. Norman Hogg be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

BROADCASTING, &c.

Ordered,

That Joan Ruddock and Mr. Brian Wilson be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c., and that Mrs. Lin Golding and Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

ARMED FORCES BILL

Ordered,

That Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes be discharged from the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill and that Mr. Julian Critchley be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope]*

PETITION

Opencast Mining (Rigside)

12.12 am

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I wish to present this petition on behalf of the community of Rigside, a small village in my constituency, which objects to the imposition of a public inquiry by the Secretary of State for Scotland to again consider the planning application of L. A. W. Mining Company to mine opencast on the Townhead site near Rigside.

The Clydesdale district council unanimously rejected this application in the first instance, but was overruled by the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the court in Edinburgh ruled that his decision to overrule the council's objection was flawed and in breach of planning law. In presenting this petition, I express my full support to the local community of Rigside, and in particular the Rigside community council, for their unstinting efforts to prevent such a disastrous development.

I commend the petition to the House. It reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of Rigside and others sheweth.

That the Community of Rigside is opposed to L. A. W. Mining planned extraction of fire clay and coal by open cast method at Townhead Farm in its midst.

That a clear reason for refusal of planning permission for this development has been identified during Court of Session proceedings.

That the planned development is unreasonable when National Guidelines are observed.

That it were an ill precedent for future development in this valley, with its high reserves of coal and rich with its mining tradition, should instance of this sort of mineral extraction be approved.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House now seek a determination from the Secretary of State for Scotland in acknowledgement of the Judges' findings without recourse to further inquiry.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Police (Derbyshire)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

12.12 am

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I rise to call attention to the difficulties faced by Derbyshire police force, currently under the management of Derbyshire county council. I am pleased to recognise the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) here tonight. I have no complaint against the police themselves. Derbyshire police officers, men and women, uniformed, detectives and civilians, are outstanding people and perform their difficult task in that county with good humour, courtesy and competence. Indeed, police at all levels are well respected and trusted by my constituents. I am also glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) here tonight.

The problem is that the police in Derbyshire are forced to do their job hampered and hindered quite deliberately by the county authority. The results are truly appalling, as demonstrated in the recent savagely critical report by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary published in December 1990, based on an inspection carried out between 16 and 20 July 1990. For example, in paragraph 1.8, the inspector says:

"The picture of Derbyshire police force portrayed during the inspection is mixed, but all too often one of deterioration of infrastructure and morale."

More than 40 urgent recommendations are listed in that report.

Derbyshire covers 1,000 square miles and the police force has to look after 1 million people. Officially, the establishment is a full one. We have 1,791 officers in post out of an establishment of 1,793. But first of all, the establishment is not enough. Each Derbyshire police officer polices 63 more people than the national average. The last time that there was any increase in police numbers was in 1987. Since then, the police committee has refused to guarantee its part of the funding for increases, so we have lost all the increases.

Nor does the problem relate only to uniformed officers. In Derbyshire, we are particularly dependent on civilians, with a higher than average civilian establishment to population size. But worse, the civilian posts are not filled either and there is a continual shortfall. The uniformed officers then have to do the job of the civilians. For example, there should be 309 traffic wardens. That is the official establishment. In post at the time of the report there were 84. As a result, police officers are frequently required to carry out traffic warden functions. Similarly, there should be 14 more control room operators, who are supposed to be civilians according to official Derbyshire police force management policy—but there are not, so the job has to be done by uniformed officers.

Many civilian posts have been outstanding since 1988 and the average length of time taken to fill a civilian post is six months. That is expensive, it withdraws beat officers from their duties and it means that police are frequently not visible at all on the streets of Derby and in the Derbyshire villages.

That also increases the strain on all the officers. As the report shows, the number of days lost through sickness has been increasing steadily—an increase of more than 19 per

cent. between 1987 and 1989. More worrying, the time lost through injury on duty jumped by 38 per cent. in a year. The situation is a matter of considerable concern to all our constituents and most of all to those serving in the force.

The report quotes many similarly worrying features about staff, equipment and buildings. The fingerprint bureau should have 13 officers, but it has an establishment of nine with only six in post. As paragraph 4.30 of the report says, the

"position is untenable and the department teeters on the brink of complete collapse."

We have only 16·4 marked vehicles per hundred officers, whereas similar forces have 20·5—25 per cent. more. There are no armed response vehicles. There are no trained accident investigators. There is insufficient protection for the police in cases of public disorder. The police computing facilities are inadequate, unsafe, inefficient and obsolescent. The main processes on the command and control system failed 128 times in a year. The inspector says:

"The normal workload of the computer grossly exceeds the design capacity by 227 per cent."

The casualty bureau is totally inadequate and we are told that the

"system would fail under any realistic pressure".

Some 45,000 crime reports have to be read and analysed manually, which is almost unbelievable in a force this size. There is no female police surgeon. There are inadequate facilities for rape and child abuse cases. No drug squad member is trained to nationally recognised standards. Derbyshire constabulary lacks surveillance capacity and has only limited access to vehicles suitable for covert operations.

It is not just personnel and equipment that create problems, but buildings as well. The last new police station was completed in 1981. The county failed to submit any building plans from 1987 onwards. One station in Derby, Peartree, which was intended to have a 20-year life when it was erected in 1945 but is still there, is

"nearing the point of total decay"

and

"is an insult to police, civilians and the public"

with foul toilets, a temperature in the office at the time of inspection of 98 deg F, a badly leaking roof and various other major problems. The inspector says that the

"state of repair of police buildings is generally quite extraordinary."

But it is not that money is not available. Indeed, he goes on to say:

"The fact that moneys allocated and approved for building maintenance have been consistently underspent for the past four financial years seems irreconcilable with the building deterioration evident during the inspection."

In fact nearly £168,000 has been underspent in those budgets in the past four years. The inspector is also extremely critical of the state of police housing. In fact, savings are made on the police budget and the report says very cautiously in paragraph 2.72 that these savings

"may be spent in another area of County Council concern."

In other words, the county has the money, but it chooses not to spend it on the police.

In one area, Derbyshire county council is very careful with money—other people's money. It charges £22 for a neighbourhood watch sign or £112 if it comes with a pole. In the HM inspector's words, this

"appears a direct disincentive to this priority crime prevention initiative."

As a result, complaints are up by 22 per cent. and only 57 per cent. of respondents to Derbyshire county council's own survey in 1989 reported satisfaction with the police. I must say that I think it is the height of cynicism for Derbyshire county council to spend public money doing a public opinion survey on attitudes to the police when the main problem comes from the county's failure to spend money allocated to the police.

Worst of all, crime rates are climbing in Derbyshire. In 1989 crime was up by 13 per cent. on the previous year. That is higher than in similar forces. In the six months before the inspection in 1990, crime climbed by a further 22 per cent. and the detection rate was falling. Indeed, the detection rate was well below that of similar forces. This is partly because we do not have enough police and partly because they are not well equipped. It is also partly became they are forced to do the wrong jobs. Most of all, it is because the police do not have the support of those responsible for the Derbyshire county council and the police authority.

The problems mainly arise because of the control systems exercised over the police, which are unbelievably bureaucratic and cumbersome. I quote the report again:

"In Derbyshire budgetary control has yet to be devolved to the Chief Constable."

That is normal practice elsewhere. Constant interference by councillors means that the chief constable has no opportunity for virement or to manage his budgets efficiently.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East) *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: No, I will not give way.

Any purchase of more than £3,000 must be approved by the police committee. The same applies to any purchase of more than £300 if it is a piece of electronic equipment. Such a thing as a new telephone line must go back to the police committee for reapproval. It is noticeable, of course, that these committees are extremely well staffed, and their staffing has increased. "Management" means holding reviews and producing dozens upon dozens of reports, turning the police body over and poking it until it is red raw. The reports are then put on the shelf and remain stuck in the system for years. These include urgent items which are 100 per cent. funded by the Home Office.

According to the inspector, the bureaucratic requirements of the county council and the police committee are "a major obstacle to the efficient management of the force." He talks about the

"parsimonious fettering of police management"

which has taken its toll of both innovation and morale. I believe that it is more than parsimonious and more than a major obstacle—I believe that it is reckless, dangerous and unbelievably stupid.

It is nothing to do with capital controls or expenditure limits—these affect every police authority in the country and none has the mess that we have in Derbyshire. It has nothing to do with charge capping, which was brought in after the inspections which led to this report. The problems have been going on for a very long time.

"There has been a virtual standstill in developing the constabulary and its resources for the last eight years."

That is a direct quote from paragraph 1.9. In those eight years other overall staffing in the county rose by more than 8,000, and the county budget topped £500 million—one of the largest in the country. There is no shortage of money in Derbyshire.

[Mrs. Currie]

The fact is that certain key people in our county hierarchy are deeply hostile to the police for political reasons. They believe that the police should be accountable. They want a police force and a chief constable who will do their bidding. All the financial and administrative procedures are designed to that end. We saw it during the miners' strike, when I had to insist to the Home Secretary that my working miners had full protection in order to exercise their right to work. We saw it during the hounding from office of Chief Constable Alf Parrish. The expenditure row was blown up out of all proportion and led to his early retirement, his subsequent breakdown, and his tragic early death—a broken man—just a few months ago. That death should be on the consciences of Councillor Bookbinder, leader of Derbyshire county council, and his henchmen, for the rest of their lives.

When Mr. Parrish's replacement—an internal appointee who did his best—retired last year, Mr. Bookbinder attempted several times, with complete cynicism and great determination, to impose his chosen candidate as chief constable. He was another internal candidate, and no doubt a very good policeman, but he was not approved by the Home Office. Mr. Bookbinder tried, but at last—thanks to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister of State—he failed. We now have a new chief constable, John Newing from the Metropolitan police, to whom I and my hon. Friends offer our best wishes and support.

Armed with the report, and with the continued backing of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, I hope that we may now see progress. Tonight, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to say what action has been taken to put matters right since the report was published. A recent Home Office letter stated that certain measures had already been put in hand. I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will say what they are. What further action is in the pipeline? When will the next inspection be made, because the present situation cannot be allowed to continue much longer? The county says that the previous Her Majesty's inspectorate inspections were favourable. If that is true, it is scandalous. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that claim.

When the Government have a role in setting and monitoring police standards but the powers to run the establishment are delegated by law to a local authority, may we have an assurance that the Government will do everything necessary to guarantee proper maintenance of standards in relation to the police and crime prevention in Derbyshire so that my constituents, those of my hon. Friends, and everyone in the fine county of Derbyshire, will be properly cared for?

12.26 am

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I thank my hon. Friends the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and the Minister for allowing me to make a short contribution. The overview given by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South was so comprehensive, and her indictment of Derbyshire county council's political interference in its police force so devastating, that I have little to add.

When Derbyshire county council has been criticised over the years for wasteful spending on a variety of pet political projects, such as the now defunct millionaire's playground, into which the council invested an unknown amount of money, and publicity such as——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. What does that have to do with Derbyshire police?

Mr. Oppenheim: When the county council has been criticised for such expenditure, it has argued that it at least runs its administration efficiently. The report blows a large hole in that rickety argument. It is probably the most devastating indictment of a council's administration. It is certainly a devastating indictment of its interference in the police force.

The report says that the way that the council acted verged on the unconstitutional, and reveals that Derbyshire county council, far from being an efficient authority, is grossly inefficient and has no regard for administration and value for money.

One of the claims made by those who defend the council is that the situation all has to do with underfunding, under-resourcing and poll-tax capping. The truth is that Derbyshire county council is one of the highest-spending authorities per head in the country. County councils such as Surrey spend less, yet it has the same problems in administering its police force.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is unfair to the House for an hon. member to use another hon. Member's Adjournment to widen the debate beyond the subjet that is on the Order Paper. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now address his remarks to the question of Derbyshire police force.

Mr. Oppenheim: Funding relates directly to Derbyshire police force, because one of the arguments is that the force is underfunded and that that has caused the problems which have given rise to this devastating report by the inspectorate.

I seek to refute that argument by asserting that Derbyshire has been extremely well funded and is one of the highest spenders per head. Therefore this has nothing to do with funding and everything to do with priorities. Other counties spend far less per head, yet manage to spend more on their police force or have fewer problems with its administration. This has everything to do with priorities because Derbyshire county council has been more than happy to put its money into many other areas but the police force has been starved of funds. The council has been willing to put money into Insight and is considering putting Insight on to video, yet too often simple requests for extra funding for the police have been turned down in a manner which has been prejudicial to the well-being and the running of Derbyshire police force.

An early-day motion on this subject mentions the need for democratic accountability. The problem with Derbyshire police force is not that a lack of democratic accountability is undermining the police force, but that local councillors, who are using their democratic role to politicise the force, are undermining it.

The county council has consistently run Derbyshire county constabulary in a fashion that verges on turning it into a department of the council, which is virtually unconstitutional and an absolute disgrace.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The early-day motion that the hon. Gentleman referred to is in my name and it points out that the report is a hatchet job, which attempts to undermine the police committee and democratic operations in the area. The report lacks professionalism and the evidence that goes with it is full of inconsistencies and takes no account of any of the financial problems under which the authority has to operate. Derbyshire has a fine county council and a fine police force, and I am sorry to hear the hon. Member attacking both.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is acting his role as the poodle of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in his absence and is way over the top in his support of the council. People in Derbyshire do not think that they have a fine county council—they are sick and tired of it and cannot wait for the day when we get rid of Councillor Bookbinder and his motley crew, who have done so much damage to Derbyshire police force. They have also immensely damaged the people of Derbyshire.

The report, which is not a political report but was compiled by a highly respected independent inspectorate, makes it clear that the police have been politically interfered with by the local councillors who run Derbyshire county council, in a way which is prejudicial to the well-being and the good policing of the county. The sooner the hon. Gentleman accepts that fact and stops defending Councillor Bookbinder and his crew, merely because they happen to be in the same party, the better. Derbyshire county council is an absolute disgrace and the way in which it has tried to interfere with the police force is also a disgrace.

If a Labour Government got in and tried to increase what they term the "political accountability" of police forces, we would end up with an even worse situation. There would not merely be the sort of political interference which we have at present, but police committees and elements of the police force would be packed with the political friends of the likes of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East and Councillor Bookbinder. If they had their way I should not be surprised if people like David Skinner, the chairman of Derbyshire Labour party, who has already been given one plum county council job, did not find their way into a police authority job.

That is the danger of the sort of political interference which has taken place within Derbyshire constabulary, and which we should see even more of if Opposition Members had their way. Such politicisation of the police force is immensely dangerous, and I suspect that the majority of Opposition Members, who have a modicum of sense, do not want it.

This report is undoubtedly the most devastating indictment of the way in which a police force is run that has ever been produced in this country. It behoves Opposition Members to take some note of that and to be concerned about it, instead of blindly defending their political mates in the county of Derbyshire. I believe that the day is dawning when we shall be shot of Councillor Bookbinder and his motley crew, and I have a suspicion that we have not much longer to wait.

12.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on securing tonight's debate. She is rightly concerned about the state of policing in Derbyshire; so, clearly, are a number of my hon. Friends who represent Derbyshire seats and who are present tonight. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) —who has just spoken to considerable effect—and my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) are worried about the recent report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, which presented such a bleak and disturbing picture, as they took the trouble to tell me so beforehand. Although I note that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) is also interested in the matter—I have read his early-day motion—he did not contact me; nevertheless, I listened carefully to his intervention.

Mr. Harry Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: I will give way briefly, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have little time. On the last occasion when I faced him from the Dispatch Box in an Adjournment debate, his remarks took up almost all the time available.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister says that I did not contact him about the issue. I contacted the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) to ask whether I could be allowed a short period in which to make a speech——

Mrs. Currie: And I said no.

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Lady said no: obviously, she was frightened of what she might hear. As it was her debate, there was no point in my approaching the Minister to discuss the issue; but I will certainly approach him to discuss the content of that disgraceful, unprofessional report. The person who produced it is also disgraceful: he used it to undermine a police committee, and it is inconsistent with all the earlier reports.

Mr. Lloyd: That may be the hon. Gentleman's view, but this is my hon. Friend's Adjournment debate, and it is her privilege to determine who should contribute to it.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said when the report was published, it was without doubt one of the worst reports on any police force; but before I discuss the report itself, and the action that we are taking, I must draw an important distinction between the Derbyshire constabulary and the police authority.

The members of the Derbyshire constabulary have done an excellent job in maintaining standards of service as well as they have in what can only be described as the most difficult circumstances. My right hon. Friend and I have great admiration for the way in which it has managed to maintain a high standard of professional policing while buildings deteriorate around it and the police authority imposes absurd levels of bureaucratic control on the police budget.

It is with the police authority that the responsibility lies. Under section 4 of the Police Act 1964, it is the police authority that has the duty

"to secure the maintenance of an adequate and efficient police force for the area",

and, as the inspection report shows, it has come perilously close to failing in that duty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South has already drawn the House's attention to the manifold failings of the police authority—the failure to devolve any significant financial responsibility to the chief constable;

[Mr. Lloyd]

agreed expenditure having to be reapproved through a labyrinth of council committees; civilian posts left vacant, or taking six months to fill; trained police officers being taken off the streets to cover for civilian vacancies; 19 additional posts approved by the Home Secretary for 1990, but turned down by the council; maintenance budgets consistently underspent while broken windows remain unrepaired—and so on, and so on. The report is a published document, as all HMI reports now are, and the details are set out in it by the regional HMI better than I could hope to do tonight. It repays careful reading—particularly, I suggest, by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East.

Let me pull out just one chastening detail. Paragraph 3.5 points out that the casualty bureau is antiquated and that the four incoming telephone lines would be inadequate to deal with the demands of a major disaster. The HMI concludes that

"the system would fail under any realistic pressure".

The House has listened too often to statements from Ministers detailing the horrific disasters which have befallen us in recent years. None of us can say that it will not happen in my county, and we know the pressure of thousands of phone calls from anxious relatives. Therefore, I find the complacency of Derbyshire frightening and inexplicable.

What is the response of Derbyshire county council? It is to blame the Government for cuts in funding. Well, I suppose they would say that. But what puzzles me is this: if it is all the fault of the Government, as they say, why is it only Derbyshire that faces such extreme problems? The same funding principles apply across the country, but Her Majesty's inspectorate reports for other counties present a very different picture, with an effective partnership between the police authority and its police force. There is no magic that uniquely puts Derbyshire in a worse position than its neighbours. The issue is simply that Derbyshire county council, through its police authority, exercises a very different set of priorities on policing.

It is instructive to look closely at how Derbyshire adjusted its budget for 1990-91 in response to capping. The county council's total original budget was 40 per cent. above the standard spending assessment, but the original police budget of £29 million was marginally below the police SSA of £29·6 million. No cuts at all need have been made in the police budget, but the council imposed a uniform cut of 3·5 per cent.—nearly £2 million—to finance its overspending in other quarters. The council was well aware of the damage that would do to the police: last August, the chief constable, the clerk to the police authority and the county treasurer wrote jointly:

"The reductions for the constabulary will cut deeply into the level of service provided to the people of Derbyshire."

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East would no doubt complain about the effect of reduction in capital provision, but the reduction in capital provision applies to forces across the country, not just to Derbyshire. Derbyshire's protests sound a little hollow when one remembers that the authority has not seriously attempted to upgrade its police building stock for many years.

Derbyshire tells us that the inspectorate's criticism has come out of the blue and that things cannot have deteriorated so swiftly since the previous year's inspection. Indeed they did not. That is why letters to the chairman of the police committee in 1987, 1988 and 1989 drew attention to a range of serious concerns about delays in filling vacancies, the budget review process and the absence of a building programme. It is the sustained failure of the police authority to take action on these matters that has led to the present deplorable situation.

It is clear that I shall not have time to finish the remarks that I wanted to make in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South. In summary, the inspectorate is staying closely in touch with Derbyshire. A number of measures to improve efficiency have already been put in hand. The responsibility for meeting these criticisms rests firmly with the Derbyshire authorities, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be receiving reports on the matter. If the situation does not improve, he has a responsibility to make sure that in the end it does; but I hope that it will not come to that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 23 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications

1. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the telecommunications duopoly.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): I have received more than 190 written responses to the consultative document on competition and choice in telecommunications. The vast majority firmly supported the document's main proposals.

Mr. McAvoy: Is the Secretary of State aware that the 14 January deadline for submissions on the Government's consultation document has caused great consternation in the industry? Is two months long enough for comments on a document which proposes such fundamental changes to one of our most important industries—changes which the Government have considered for seven years?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is right that everyone had seven years' notice of the consultation. Forty companies made representations before I even published the consultation document. Six of the 190 companies made representations after the 14 January deadline and we shall do our best to consider any late representations.

Dr. Hampson: Will my right hon. Friend think twice about proposals to allow British Telecom to deliver entertainment services to households? Those of us who want massive investment in cabling in Britain fear that that might be a threat by British Telecom to deter investment in the cable industry.

Mr. Lilley: I shall, of course, consider very carefully my hon. Friend's remarks and the other representations on that issue that I have received as a result of the consultation process. The considerations that my hon. Friend mentioned are those which originally led me to make the proposal in the consultative document.

Mr. Henderson: When will the Secretary of State be able to respond to the representations that he received in relation to the consultative paper? Does he agree with British Telecom that there can be no effective competition without firm regulation on matters such as the price of access of potential competitors to the BT network? Will the Secretary of State modify the proposals in his consultative paper to ensure that there is effective regulation to protect the public interest and to protect a competitive environment, high technical standards, proper research and development and capital investment in the local loop?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a firm date by which the conclusions will have been reached. I shall endeavour to do so as rapidly as is compatible with proper consideration of the representations. I do not want an unnecessarily long period of uncertainty. I agree that regulation is necessary, although competition is desirable. Under the previous arrangements for a nationalised industry with which the Labour Government were satisfied, there was no regulator. In the words of the Fabian Society, the nationalised industry was left to regulate itself. We prefer a privatised industry but a firm regulatory authority and that is what we have.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that when he considers the representations he will give greater weight—or at least equal weight—to the representations of user gorups and individual customers than to those of the massive formerly nationalised industry, which now puts so much pressure on the Government to stop free competition? Will equal access be speeded up so that more people can get into the telecommunications market and therefore force prices down through competition?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The consumer interest must and will be paramount. We place great emphasis on competition because that is the best way of ensuring the consumer interest, although, in some areas, as I said, regulation is essential to reinforce it. With regard to my hon. Friend's point about equal access, I shall consider the responses to the proposal that I made in the document.

Imports

2. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to reduce import penetration.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Department's policies aim to foster the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. McKay: Is the Minister aware that, since 1979, import penetration in manufacturing industry has increased by 10 per cent., in chemicals by 12 per cent., in electronics by 21 per cent. and in computer and office equipment by 92 per cent? When will the Minister stop giving bland answers and support manufactures and manufacturing industry? Does he agree that on Friday our balance of payments deficit will be in excess of £15 billion?

Mr. Sainsbury: Import penetration is a feature of advanced economies. Indeed, on the basis of OECD statistics, import penetration in the United Kingdom is a little less than that in Germany, which would imply that we are on a fairly level playing field.

Sir John Stokes: Is my hon. Friend aware that I represent a seat which is thoroughly concerned with manufacturing industry and that the vast majority of my constituents agree with me that the only way to beat

import penetration is for British industry to make products that can be sold successfully throughout the world?

Mr. Sainsbury: As so often, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I congratulate British manufacturing industry on the great increase in productivity and exports that it achieved in the 1980s.

Mr. Beggs: Is the Minister aware that a United Kingdom company that has supplied a proven product to United Kingdom ambulance services for the past four years has been excluded from a contract valued at £3·8 million? That contract was awarded in favour of an overseas competitor. Does the Minister agree that all Government Departments and those who spend public money must support our manufacturing industry and, when possible, award contracts to British companies? Will he seek the support of the Secretary of State for Health and hold an inquiry into how that contract has been awarded and, if possible, have it suspended during reappraisal?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to be able to reasure the hon. Gentleman that more than 90 per cent. of the goods and services bought by the Government are from United Kingdom sources. Of course, the Government, as a purchaser, are looking to give the best possible value to the taxpayer.

The contract to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to write to him about it.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: As a manufacturer involved in the manufacturing of consumer goods, does my hon. Friend agree that the bottom line is that the consumer should want to buy English or British produce because it is more attractive in terms of price and design? At the end of the day that is what manufacturing industry in this country must achieve if we are to reverse import penetration.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am glad that he mentions design as an important feature for a successful manufacturer and, of course, good service to the customer is also important. Being close to the market can be a great advantage to British manufacturers.

Manufacturing Industry

3. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the president of the CBI to discuss manufacturing industry.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): Ministers and officials from the Department of Trade and Industry regularly meet representatives of the Confederation of British Industry. Last week I met CBI representatives on two occasions, once to discuss wider ownership and once to hear their views on pay and productivity.

Mr. Hughes: With high interest rates costing industry £30 billion a year, with investment falling, with output down for each of the past seven months and with manufacturing redundancies running at 1,500 a week, is not it now time for the Government to take up the call of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in his leadership election manifesto for a more interventionist policy by the Government to save manufacturing industry from extinction?

Mr. Redwood: The adjustment to get down inflation has some costs. The CBI itself asked for membership of the exchange rate mechanism and the Government have adopted that discipline. It is very important, as the CBI is now telling its membership, for higher productivity that the adjustments should take place. There are many market opportunities and big export opportunities. Manufacturing exports are at record levels and there are many opportunities for import substitution. Many good companies in British industry are now addressing those matters to offer jobs and prosperity.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that the decline in our manufacturing industry has directly led to our economy becoming extremely vulnerable? Does he further accept that the level of interest rates and the level at which we entered the exchange rate mechanism continue to contribute to the undermining of our manufacturing industry? Will he accept from me the sad news that several leading United Kingdom manufacturers in high technology are considering locating manufacturing plants in other countries in the European Community where the economic climate is much more advantageous?

Mr. Redwood: There are many fine companies and industries in our manufacturing sector. They are doing much better than they did under Labour in the 1970s and they will continue to do so. The aerospace, pharmaceutical and motor car industries are finding many new opportunities. I welcome the great expansion in the motor car industry where output is running at about 1·3 million cars per annum compared with a low point of only 900,000 cars less than 10 years ago. That is welcome progress. Of course, the Government want the adjustment to a low-inflation, high-productivity economy to occur rapidly. The sooner that that adjustment takes place, the greater the success will be.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister share the concern felt by many that manufacturing output and investment are collapsing much more quickly than the Government predicted? Does he agree that that is partly due to the corporation tax system and its non-neutrality with regard to inflation? Will he and his colleagues urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reform the corporation tax system, for example, by increasing investment allowances to 40 per cent?

Mr. Redwood: Corporation tax policy is a matter for the Treasury, not the Department of Trade and Industry. However, the hon. and learned Gentleman should know that corporation tax in Britain is one of the lowest in the free enterprise world. It is welcome that the tax burden is proportionately lower here. That may be a contributory factor to the large amount of inward investment which Britain has attracted in recent years. Many overseas countries and companies recognise that Britain is the place in which to invest and we intend to encourage such investment further.

Mr. Devlin: Does my hon. Friend agree that today's refusal by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to allow the takeover of ICI Agricultural Chemicals by Kemira has come much too late? Does he agree that if it

had turned down Kemira's earlier bid for Fisons and if his Department had prevented that nationalised company from undercutting and wrecking the market in agricultural chemicals, many of my constituents would not face the prospect of unemployment as a result of today's announcement?

Mr. Redwood: I hope that ICI finds some other solution for its agrochemical business, if there is a commercial and industrial way of doing so, because I want those jobs to be preserved. The MMC findings illustrate the wisdom of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when, as a matter of policy, he drew the attention of the MMC to the possibility that bids from nationalised industries could be more damaging and less fair than other bids. In its two reports published today, the MMC illustrated that that can be the case. In the case that my hon. Friend mentioned it found against the deal partly because of anxieties about the conduct of nationalised companies. The Government are determined to see fair play in markets. Part of that fair play must be to make sure that nationalised companies do not abuse their position in capital, product or service markets to the detriment of British jobs and industry.

Mr. Gordon Brown: But with manufacturing output down by £2 billion, manufacturing investment down 4 per cent., 100 companies going bankrupt every day and unemployment rising faster than anywhere else in western Europe, are not the Government, who began by provoking a manufacturing recession, causing yet another such recession far more severe than Ministers are prepared to admit? Is not it time that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not just a junior Minister, spoke up for the needs of industry, ended the self-satisfied complacency and argued the case in Government, first, for a cut in interest rates and, secondly, for a budget for investment in industry?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend speaks up well for British industry and is a great ally and friend of it. British industry is flourishing considerably more under this Government than it ever did under the Labour Government. Output in manufacturing is up, whereas it used to fall under the Labour Government, and our unemployment is considerably below the European average. Whenever something is adverse in comparison with Europe we hear about it all the time from Opposition Members, but that is not the case on unemployment because they know that we have a much better record than do some of our European partners.

Last year, more new companies were created than fell on hard times. There was an extremely satisfactory rate of new company formation last year and we welcomed it as a sign of a flourishing enterprise economy.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Is not it a credit to the increased efficiency of the British motor manufacturing industry—I pay particular credit to Rover in the west midlands—that, despite a decline in United Kingdom car sales, the export of British cars has been tremendous? That is largely due to the fact that we have achieved increased efficiency. As a result of the 44·7 per cent. increase in car exports those companies are now working to full capacity.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes her point extremely well. The British Government are extremely proud of the British motor industry and are proud of all those companies investing and located here. They have made great strides in improving the quality and performance of their products. They now have a number of world-beating products that will continue to go from strength to strength on world markets.

The latest figures for the export of motor cars are heartening. They show that the British economy can flourish based upon more exports to overseas markets where there are good opportunities for growth and based upon import substitution as, once again, British people back British products because they are well made and good.

Trade (Germany)

4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest trade figures between Britain and Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the first 11 months of 1990, United Kingdom visible exports to Germany were valued at £12 billion; imports from Germany were £18·5 billion. Compared with the similar period in 1989, exports are up by 18·5 per cent., while imports are virtually unchanged.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister have the guts to tell us what the deficit was in 1979? Is he aware that the deficit between Britain and Germany was £1·6 billion when the Tories took over and that when the Government announce the figures on Friday, it will be £7·1 billion? No wonder the Germans told the Governor of the Bank of England to get lost yesterday. Is not it a sad reflection on this country that, after 1945 when everyone was throwing their caps in the air, the Government are now going cap in hand to the Germans? We know who the top dogs are now.

Mr. Sainsbury: It appears that the hon. Gentleman has some reservations about the Government's economic policy. I should like to hear him pay tribute to the success of those parts of our industry that are exporting to Germany so effectively. Clothing industry exports have gone up 40 per cent. and medical and pharmaceutical exports are up 41 per cent. in the first 11 months of this year.

Mr. William Powell: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are immense opportunities for British companies in the former Soviet sector of Germany, now eastern Germany, particularly for the infrastructural industries of transport, telecommunications energy and water? Will my hon. Friend use the full resources of his Department to draw those opportunities for trade and investment to the attention of British companies?

Mr. Sainsbury: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. He will be aware that an extremely successful seminar was held last week, jointly sponsored by my Department and the CBI, with the Treuhandanstalt. That seminar drew the attention of British industries to investment and trade opportunities with the former East German territories.

Mr. Hoyle: But in relation to the deficit with Germany does the Minister ever go out and talk to manufacturers? If he does, what have they told him about going into the ERM at 2·9—almost 3—deutschmarks to the pound? [HON. MEMBERS: "You wanted it."] We did not want it at that figure. Those manufacturers would tell the Minister that it is not possible to be competitive at that rate. What is the Minister and the miserable team that he has round

him doing about that? I know that none of them has any experience of industry—the Minister for Trade was kept in the back office of the family firm. The Minister and his team should at least get out and, in the words of the former Prime Minister, back British industry, and tell the Treasury that it was wrong.

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I make it my purpose to have contacts with industry nearly as close as those which I had when I spent 20 years in industry. I also assure the hon. Gentleman that, although it is sometimes suggested that a lower exchange rate would be helpful for exports, I frequently hear it suggested that a stable exchange rate and lower inflation are much more to be welcomed.

Manufacturing Output

5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the level of manufacturing output for the past year; what was the level in previous years; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): Figures for manufacturing output are not yet available for the whole of 1990. Provisional estimates show that manufacturing output in the first 11 months of 1990 averaged 119·0, based upon 1985 equal to 100, similar to the record annual level of 1989.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the volume of manufacturing output increased by 8·5 per cent. during the first 11 months of 1990? Does my hon. Friend agree that that would not have happened had not our industry been made much more competitive as a result of the transformation achieved by the Government over the past 11 years—in terms of competitiveness and everything else?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the transformation of British industry in the last decade. Output, productivity, exports and investment are all well above their 1980 levels and exports are at a record level.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Minister agree that the steelworkers of Lanarkshire are only too willing to contribute to British manufacturing output—in particular the men of Ravenscraig, Clydesdale, Dalzell and Imperial who are losing their jobs? The Minister for Corporate Affairs tells people to buy British. When will he tell that to British Steel?

Mr. Leigh: The prospects for British Steel have been transformed under this Government. Losses running into £1 billion in 1979, under the Labour Government, have been tranformed into profits of more than £600 million now. Opposition Members like to pose as friends of manufacturing industry. It is interesting that when they were last able to act on that friendship, manufacturing output fell.

GATT

6. **Mr. Lester:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the Uruguay round of the GATT.

15. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the likely results of a successful completion of the GATT negotiations.

Mr. Lilley: We continue to press for the early resumption of talks, as a successful Uruguay round would include fully for the first time agriculture, services, textiles, intellectual property and investment as well as significant reductions in tariffs, quotas and other barriers and improvements in disciplines and safeguards. Such an outcome would be highly beneficial for the United Kingdom and would provide a much-needed non-inflationary stimulus to the world economy. Failure would mean a return to protectionism, trade wars and beggar-my-neighbour policies.

Mr. Lester: My right hon. Friend continues to press for a settlement of the Uruguay round. Although the House is now concentrating on the Gulf war, many of us are still concerned that the GATT round remains unresolved. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the United States estimates that, by the end of the decade, non-inflationary growth in the world will amount to about $4 trillion? That would be of particular benefit not only to the United Kingdom but to many developing countries about which many of us are still deeply concerned.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The United States has estimated that, in terms of reductions in tariffs alone, a successful round would produce an extra $4 trillion of income in the world by the end of the century. My hon. Friend is also absolutely right to point out the importance to third-world countries of a successful outcome to the Uruguay round as those countries, more than any others, need an open and buoyant world trading environment.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My right hon. Friend will know that, before coming to this place, I spent my life in textiles and that I therefore have a deep interest in the outcome of GATT and in its effects on the multi-fibre arrangement and the textile industry. If there is a gap between agreement on GATT and the phasing out of the MFA, a dreadful vacuum will be created. Can my right hon. Friend reassure the textile industry about what he might do if such a vacuum were created?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance for the textile industry, in his constituency and more widely, of a successful outcome to the round. Failure to agree would mean that the existing multi-fibre arrangement would lapse in July of this year. That would be unacceptable to us, to the industry and to the world and would lead to the necessity for other arrangements. It would be better by far to have a successful conclusion to the GATT round by the target date of 1 March.

Mr. James Lamond: Will the Secretary of State ensure that his remarks are conveyed to those negotiating on our behalf? He must have received the same anguished letters as we have from manufacturers who say that unless the GATT regulations are strengthened and enforced, doing away with the MFA will bring further problems for the textile industry, which is already very weak.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The embryonic agreement on textiles which would be available if we conclude the whole GATT round would

result in a transitional phasing out of the MFA over 10 years, which would be more acceptable than its precipitate ending in July. We have done all in our power—and I continue to consult colleagues in the European Community, as well as in other countries with whom we established close relationships during the Brussels week of negotiations—to urge an early resumption of talks.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the Government are bringing forward specific proposals which might lead to the resumption of the talks, which are vital to all who represent constituencies not only with textile interests, where we see redundancy after redundancy, but with agricultural interests which are important to the rural community?

Mr. Lilley: The GATT negotiations are carried out by the European Commission on behalf of member states, so it is essential that the Commission should use its negotiating power to the full and that it should seek to get back to the negotiating table as rapidly as possible. We have pressed for that within the Community, as is widely recognised.

Mr. Dickens: I am afraid that I cannot speak with great volume today. The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) was right in his plea for the textile industry in the north-west. The round of negotiations is critical for thousands of textile workers in the area. I implore my right hon. Friend to make sure that he gets it right.

Mr. Lilley: I never thought that I would have difficulty in hearing my hon. Friend. I entirely endorse his message that the industry is of great importance to the north-west. We are very concerned to ensure a proper settlement within GATT. There is the basis of an agreement which would be satisfactory, I think, to the textile industry; certainly it would be much more satisfactory than failure to agree.

Ms. Quin: Has the Secretary of State seen the widespread criticism in the press of the Government's stance on agriculture within the European Community? Is he aware that agriculture accounts for 1·5 per cent. of our GDP while manufacturing, construction and financial services account for over 50 per cent? Surely the Government can find ways to help agriculture that do not put in jeopardy the major part of the economy.

Mr. Lilley: I have not seen the widespread criticism. I recall the last Labour Prime Minister's son-in-law describing me as the hero of the GATT negotiations, but I do not think that that is what the hon. Lady was referring to. I have done all in my power, as have the whole Government, to bring about a successful conclusion to the talks, including success on the agricultural front.

Lloyd's

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to review the self-regulation of Lloyd's of London.

Mr. Redwood: The Neill committee in 1986 reviewed regulation at Lloyd's thoroughly. Its 70 recommendations have been implemented in full and I think that the new system now requires a period of stability.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He must be aware of the disquiet felt by people who are in dispute with Lloyd's because there is no form of independent appeals procedure. Will he express concern for my constituent, Mr. Cawen, who, after 25 years of exemplary service at Lloyd's, has been disbarred on a technical matter which would not occasion any form of prosecution in a court of law? Is my hon. Friend also aware that the United States Congress has expressed grave concern about the way in which Lloyd's is regulated? Will he therefore give an assurance that people in dispute with Lloyd's can look forward to a truly independent appeals system?

Mr. Redwood: There is an appeals system within Lloyd's and a large number of independent members are involved in regulation at Lloyd's—indeed, they are in a majority. If my hon. Friend would like to pursue the case of her constituent, Lloyd's would be prepared to talk to her about it, if she has her constituent's consent in so doing——

Mrs. Gorman *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Redwood: I am telling the House today that I think that Lloyd's would be prepared to discuss the case with my hon. Friend if her constituent authorises her so to do. She is also welcome to come and see me about the matter, but regulation is for Lloyd's which has a system of regulation established under statute, and independence is an important characteristic in the appeals procedure.

Ms. Mowlam: Is the Minister really as satisfied with the system at Lloyd's as his remarks just now seemed to suggest? Not only are there internal problems, as the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) pointed out—she has tried to talk to Lloyd's, but the response from Lloyd's has been negative and the Minister's response unacceptable—but there are difficulties at Howden and, as the Minister is aware, a record number of years of books are outstanding at Lloyd's. Is that what the Minister regards as regulation working?

Mr. Redwood: The new system at Lloyd's is much tougher than the old one. The recommendations are wide ranging, as the hon. Lady would know if she had done her homework. That system is now tackling the problems that arose before 1986 and the fundamental review. It is ridiculous for the hon. Lady to describe my reply as unacceptable when I have told my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that she can talk to me about the case in question and also to Lloyd's. What more can a Minister do than offer to talk through a particular case and to see whether Lloyd's can provide satisfactory answers for my hon. Friend, who needs to know both sides of the story?

Postal Services

8. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the chairman of the royal mail to discuss the quality of postal services in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the chairman of the Post Office, Sir Bryan Nicholson, regularly to discuss various matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Field: Is my hon. Friend aware that some post offices have run out of forces air mail letters? Will he promise to look into that shortage? Does he agree that the Post Office is doing an admirable job and playing a proper part in maintaining the morale of the forces in the Gulf, and none more so than the sub-post offices in our rural communities? Will he therefore ensure that those offices can compete on equal terms with Crown post offices in future?

Mr. Leigh: On the latter point, we have received assurances from the Post Office that the sub-post offices will offer the full range of services provided by Crown post offices. Indeed, the Post Office Users National Council report seems to suggest that there is more satisfaction with the service at sub-post offices than with that at Crown post offices.

As for my hon. Friend's first and important point, I emphasise that the Post Office has a comprehensive service of providing free aerogrammes to the Gulf—the blueys—and parcels can be sent to the Gulf at the same rate as the inland parcel rate. I was disturbed to hear what my hon. Friend said about some post offices not having blueys. When our troops are prepared to pay the supreme sacrifice, the Post Office must ensure that their loved ones can communicate with them easily. I shall write to the Post Office today.

Miss Hoey: I am sure that the Minister is aware of this week's report by the Post Office Users National Council, which welcomes the significant improvement in people's feelings about how capably the post office has been handling first-class mail. Will he use this opportunity to state clearly once and for all—and to keep morale in the Post Office high—that the Post Office will not be privatised under this or any future Government?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the Post Office Users National Council survey which shows that 86·2 per cent. of first class letters are being delivered the next day. As for her other point, the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) gave a commitment, which stands for the present Parliament. As regards the future, however, we are open minded and will consider all suggestions.

Mr. Soames: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the reasons for the fairly dismal performance of the first class letter service is the extensive restrictive practices still carried out by the trade unions represented in the Post Office? Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what steps he intends to instruct the chairman of the Post Office to take to break this union power?

Mr. Leigh: There have been some alarming cases of trade union industrial action which have resulted in a less than perfect service to Post Office customers. We keep these matters constantly under review. All options are open.

Property Descriptions

9. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he is considering to protect housebuyers from misleading property descriptions following his review of the Trade Descriptions Act.

Mr. Leigh: As the then Minister told the House in several written answers last year, it is the Government's intention to amend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to apply its provisions to descriptions of real property. That remains the Government's intention, subject to parliamentary time being available. However, an order under the Estate Agents Act 1979, dealing with the misdescription of property, will be laid before the House as soon as possible. This is part of a package of measures to curb malpractices in estate agency which was announced last April by the then Minister and was the subject of a consultation document issued by my Department last year.

Mrs. Adams: Does the Minister realise that, because of the Government's refusal to introduce their own legislation on this, they have left the door wide open for hundreds of unscrupulous estate agents to mislead thousands of home buyers? How can the Government justify their lack of action?

Mr. Leigh: On the contrary, the Government have listened to a number of representations. My predecessor gave a commitment on behalf of the Government, which has necessitated a full consultation period during which a number of problems have come up; but if the hon. Lady had listened to my answer she would have heard me give a commitment. She may also be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) drew a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills and intends to promote a Bill to deal with misdescription of property.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Given the cost, inconvenience and occasional distress caused to house buyers by the more fanciful hyperbole of less scrupulous estate agents, will my hon. Friend agree that the measures shortly to be brought forward by the Government in regulations and in the private Member's Bill to which he referred are welcome not only for the benefit of consumers but for the benefit of the more responsible estate agents?

Mr. Leigh: Yes. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the lacuna in the present law, in that the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 does not cover real property. We know this and intend to take action. We also intend to take action on the Estate Agents Act 1979. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] We have had to wait for time in the legislative programme, but, as I have said, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West is bringing forward a Bill in the next few weeks which should cover the problem.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I know that the House will want to join me in wishing the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) a speedy recovery from his illness.

Will the Minister tell the House why he has failed to give house buyers the protection that was promised in the Government's press statement on 19 June 1990 and which a Minister pledged to implement by the 1st of this month? Why is that protection not in place now nor likely to be in place for some months to come?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman may be confused as between our determination to bring in primary legislation to amend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and secondary legislation under an order to amend the Estate Agents Act

1979. On the first of these, we must take our place in the legislative queue; on the second, the hon. Gentleman should wait and see.

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend should be congratulated on the answers that he has given to the House. Will he agree with me that, while it is necessary to say "caveat emptor", or "buyer beware", to anyone buying a good or service, the steps that my hon. Friend has outlined should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity to protect young people, who, as first-time buyers, may take estate agents' details at face value and be deluded into buying a property which is suspect in some way?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to these matters. The Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West has not been published, but we agree with its aims, in so far as we know what they are, and hope that the Bill will become law.

Manufacturing Output

10. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

Mr. Leigh: The Government promote continued growth of manufacturing industry with policies such as reducing rates of tax on profits, privatisation, deregulation, elimination of restrictive practices, trade union reform and negotiations to reduce trade barriers through the general agreement on tariffs and trade and in the European Community. In addition, my Department continues to operate a range of schemes to improve business performance under the enterprise initiative.

Mr. McFall: As manufacturing production has gone down by a staggering £2·5 billion in the past three months, 23,000 manufacturing workers are on short-time work, redundancies are running at more than 1,500 per week and high interest rates are costing British business £30 billion per year, when will the Government do the decent thing and either own up to their mistakes, overhaul their policy and start helping British industry or shut up shop and let the Labour party get on with the job of reviving British industry?

Mr. Leigh: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have no intention of shutting up shop, or of letting our industry fall into the tender hands of a party that managed to reduce manufacturing output when it was in power. The hon. Gentleman's list is entirely selective. He ignores the fact that the prospects for British industry have been transformed in the last decade in terms of output, productivity and investment. The cost of a 1 per cent. rise in interest rates, even sustained over a full year, is far less damaging to industry in terms of wage costs than a 1 per cent. rise in inflation. The Government are determined to lick inflation.

Mr. Grylls: Does my hon. Friend agree that this question shows that there is a good deal of ignorance about what Governments can and cannot do? The one thing that Governments certainly cannot do is to boost manufacturing output. However, they can create the right climate. Will my hon. Friend use his influence with the Treasury to promote lower corporate and capital taxes for business to encourage it to make the decisions to expand and boost output?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is right, and he well knows that corporation tax in Britain is among the lowest in the industrialised world. He is also right to say that we cannot simply boost output by increasing subsidies, as suggested by the Labour party; nor can we increase investment by piling up taxation. Inventiveness and hard work cannot be encouraged by imposing controls. Those are the policies of the Labour party, but they did not work in the past and will not work in the future.

Dr. Moonie: If the Government are not responsible for the mess that industry is in, who is?

Mr. Leigh: Industry is not in a mess. As I have said, the prospects for manufacturing industry have been transformed in the last decade. Output, productivity investment and exports are well above 1980 levels and exports are at a record level. I do not mind repeating that message, because we are proud of it.

Company Profitability

11. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the rise in the profitability of non-North sea industrial and commercial companies during the 1980s.

Mr. Lilley: The profitability of non-North sea industrial and commercial companies recovered strongly during the 1980s and is now back to the levels of the early 1970s. The net real rate of return on capital employed was 8·3 per cent. in 1989, nearly half as high again as in 1979. The restoration of profitability has made possible increased investment in plant, research and development, and training.

Mr. Nicholson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that that achievement has been brought about largely by the massive improvement in productivity in the past decade, which for manufacturing has been better than that of any of our competitors? Does he also agree that the 45 per cent. improvement in business investment during the first three years of this Parliament bodes well for future profits? Will he confirm that a recent survey by 3i shows that 80 per cent. of the 750 largest companies thought that they were in better shape to prosper now than they were in the 1980s?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Productivity rose by half in the past decade, which was faster than the position in any other major country in the world, including Japan. Profitability is the key to success, and the restoration of productivity leads companies to spend more on investment, research and development, and training.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would not the profitability of car manufacturers increase if they could sell more vehicles in Japan? What is the position? Is a British manufacturer of cars allowed to sell motor vehicles in Japan directly through a distributing agent to the public or does the British manufacturer have to go through a trading company, in the same way as Nissan at present has to go through one in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lilley: Our exports in total to Japan have nearly doubled in the past three years. That includes a rapid rise in exports of motor cars, not least by the Rover company whose share of total imports of cars into Japan has risen significantly in the past five years and is rising at least as fast as that of other manufacturers. By and large, they are free to use whichever distribution channel they wish. There is a proposal by the Japanese Government to refer sole agencies to their anti-trust procedures. Last week I protested to them that they should not take that course, unless they also refer restrictive distributive practices by domestic manufacturers.

Aerospace Products

12. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value of exports of aerospace products to the United States of America for the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sainsbury: Aerospace products are included in a number of trade classifications. It is estimated, however, that the value of aerospace exports to the USA in 1989 was about £1·5 billion.

Mr. Colvin: Those exports far exceed imports, which shows the value of the aerospace industry to this country's balance of payments. Is my hon. Friend aware that aerospace products are usually priced in dollars, that the value of the pound against the dollar is currently unrealistically high and locked into the exchange rate mechanism, and that British aerospace companies therefore have the alternative either of selling products at a loss or of exporting manufacturing jobs? Is he aware that tens of thousands of jobs are at stake to dollar countries, such as the United States of America and Canada? The German Government have a Government-funded insurance scheme to cover exchange rate contingencies. Will my hon. Friend undertake to investigate that scheme and consider introducing a similar scheme in this country?

Mr. Sainsbury: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to an industry which in the past decade of Conservative government has doubled both productivity and turnover in real terms. In addition, it has trebled its exports—an achievement to which we should all pay tribute. As my hon. Friend will know, the dollar weakness affects all other currencies, not just the pound sterling. He referred to a particular German scheme. We are very keen that our industries should be able to compete on a level playing field, although that is perhaps not quite the right metaphor for the aerospace industry. My hon. Friend may be aware that there are doubts about whether the scheme to which he referred is permissible under GATT rules and I understand that it is the subject of a formal complaint to the GATT subsidies code panel.

Mr. Cryer: Everyone hopes that hostilities in the Gulf will end quickly. Will the Minister therefore confirm that the long-term viability of the aerospace industry depends on the development of civil projects and that we should not depend on military expenditure solely, to the exclusion of virtually all other projects in the United Kingdom? Will the Minister express a sympathetic view to any approaches from the industry to support civilian ventures in the same way and to the same massive extent as the Government pours money into military ventures?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure the hon. Member that we by no means depend on military aviation. We have had a number of notable successes in civil aviation. For example, GEC was awarded a contract to supply fly-by-wire systems for the Boeing 707; Rolls-Royce is taking a market share in the United States. The United States airline, America West, has signed an agreement with Airbus Industrie for the purchase of A320s. The civil aerospace industry is doing extremely well and I hope that it will continue to do so.

Telecommunications

13. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress in liberalising the telecommunications market.

Mr. Lilley: The Government have taken steps to introduce competition in all sectors of telecommunications. We now have the two largest cellular telephone networks in the world, the first telepoint services, and we are leading the world in the introduction of personal communications networks. Since British Telecom was privatised, quality of service has increased dramatically, prices have fallen by over 20 per cent. in real terms, and Mercury Communications has become established as a serious competitor. I made further proposals in the duopoly review for liberalisation to increase competition and choice for the consumer.

Mr. Butler: I welcome the additional competition and liberalisation in this country. Will my right hon. Friend now apply himself to overcoming the trade barriers to our manufacturers in Europe and Japan?

Mr. Lilley: I have just visited Japan, where I had talks with the trade Minister, aimed at liberalising trade. In particular, I encouraged him to take the big ticket items where Japan has a tendency to favour American rather than British imports.

We have sought liberalisation in other markets. We believe that one of the fruits of the liberalisation of our markets is that our manufacturers and telecommunications companies will be better placed to participate in those markets when they catch up with us, as they are beginning to do.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the liberalisation of the telecommunications market that he proposes, and which I welcome, will nevertheless have a substantial—perhaps dramatic—impact on some existing and future players in that market? In that context, is he considering the use of techniques such as computer modelling to ascertain what the effect is likely to be? Such an exercise would help us to judge what his proposals should be.

Mr. Lilley: The duopoly review that I presented was a joint initiative with Sir Bryan Carsberg, Director-General of Oftel. His organisation has carried out the sort of modelling that my hon. Friend suggested to consider the impact of various regulatory and deregulatory proposals. We have endeavoured to take into account that line of reasoning.

Accounting and Auditing Practices

14. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review accounting and auditing practices in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: The Companies Act 1989 made important changes in the law on company accounts, including improvements to the enforcement of accounting standards. It also provided a new regulatory framework for company auditors. The new Financial Reporting Council, Accounting Standards Board and Financial Reporting Review Panel have been established. Arrangements are in hand to strengthen and widen representation on the Auditing Practices Board. I shall be taking a close interest in how those changes work in practice.

Mr. Cousins: Is the Minister aware that his amazing smugness and complacency about the likely effect of the Companies Act 1989 flies in the face of experience? Is not the wide talk of profits for companies now largely fiction and a matter of opinion, with figures being massaged by standard accountancy techniques? Is the Minister further aware that such a state of affairs is not in the interests of the accountancy profession, the companies concerned or the reputation of Britain as an industrial centre?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) have tabled 436 questions on accountancy in the past two years, but they seem to have learnt nothing about the enormous strides that the profession is taking in improving the regulatory framework. They have not understood the important provisions in the Companies Act 1989 which began the debate. Rarely have so many questions been asked by so few hon. Members to try to do damage to one profession. I wish that the Opposition would lay off the profession, because their intention is malevolent. If they did that, they would recognise that the profession has extremely high standards and that, wherever those standards might lapse, disciplinary and regulatory action is being taken.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that United Kingdom accounting and auditing practices are the envy of much of the world, especially in eastern Europe where many British accounting firms now have offices doing a considerable amount of work? Is my hon. Friend also aware that the Companies Act 1989, which his Department brought into being, has set up a substantial regulatory framework to ensure that our accounting profession stays at the top compared with the rest of the world? Can my hon. Friend give any reason to explain why the Opposition continue to knock the United Kingdom accountancy profession?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. The hon. Member did not need to table 436 very expensive and time-consuming questions in order to grasp the main point —that British accountants are doing extremely well in many world markets. My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to eastern Europe where British accountants' skills are highly prized and where they have been spearheading export efforts in the service industries. I wish I could explain the reason for this persistent campaign by Opposition Members, but they will have to speak for themselves.

Shipbuilding

16. **Mr. Salmond** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his current estimate of the capacity of, and employment in, the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Leigh: Around 28,000 are employed in shipbuilding in the United Kingdom, of whom about 6,500 are in merchant shipbuilding. Merchant shipbuilding capacity is 205,000 compensated gross tonnes. Comparable figures are not available for warshipbuilding.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister come clean with the House and admit that the Government's policy proposals under the seventh directive will accelerate the decline in the shipbuilding industry? Can he point to even one policy measure from this Government which will arrest and reverse that decline rather than making the industry's problems worse?

Mr. Leigh: Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman says, it is in the interests of the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry for subsidies to be reduced. That is why we argued for a reduction in the intervention funding and why it has been agreed to reduce it from 20 per cent. to 13 per cent. for large ships and to 9 per cent. for small ships. That reduction is in the interests of the United Kingdom because we have led the way in restructuring European shipbuilding. It will be particularly helpful to warshipbuilding yards such as Cammell Laird and Swan Hunter.

Israel (Missile Attack)

3.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make a statement on the latest Iraqi missile attack on Israel.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Last night, and once again, Tel Aviv came under missile attack from Iraq. Latest statements by the Isreali Government indicate that, because of this attack, three people are dead and 98 are injured.

The House will endorse last night's statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. He said that he was appalled by this further savage attack on civilians. He expressed this country's deepest sympathy to the bereaved, to those who are hurt and to their families, and this House agrees.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister repeated our hope that, even now, the Government of Israel would show the forbearance that they have so far demonstrated and not give Saddam Hussein the satisfaction of drawing Israel into the conflict. This message was passed to the Government of Israel last night.

Israel is, of course, entitled to defend herself: that is not at issue. The question is whether it is in her interest to retaliate. We believe that it is not. To do so would be to play Saddam Hussein's game without in our view adding to Israel's security. I therefore hope that Israel, her Government and her people will continue to show the same patient and courageous restraint that they have already displayed in the face of outrageous provocation.

Mr. Kaufman: We on this side condemn this latest attack as a sign of the wickedness and desperation of Saddam Hussein. It is an act of wickedness to fire missiles armed with explosives at a country that is not involved in the war now taking place and is not involved in the dispute which led to the war. It is especially wicked to aim missiles at heavily populated centres where civilian casualties are inevitable. No doubt Saddam Hussein is proud that he has claimed the lives of three elderly, innocent women. We extend our sympathy to the bereaved families and to all the people of Israel in their ordeal and in their continuing anxiety.

It is an act of desperation to fire the missiles because no one with confidence in his war prospects would continue this cynical attempt to distort the issues in the war by trying to drag Israel into it. In any case, the Syrian and Egyptian Governments have shown that they do not intend to be taken in by those bloodthirsty manoeuvrings.

The Israeli Government deserve respect and admiration for refusing to fall into Saddam Hussein's trap. I trust that they will continue to maintain their self-restraint, without any bargain struck to win that self-restraint and difficult though it must be not to yield to the understandable impulse to hit back.

Saddam Hussein will lose the war, and the attacks will end. Peace will come to the middle east, and Israel must be part of that peace.

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that there can be nothing worse for Jewish people than to be facing the prospect in a Jewish state of gas attacks and that such a thing is almost beyond belief after the Nazi holocaust? In expressing his concern and support for the state of Israel, as he did so well, will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Americans will do everything possible, with Patriot missiles and other means, to help the Israelis to defend their air space?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The people of Israel can feel certain that the countries of the coalition will do all in their power to defend the people of Israel against this kind of attack.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On behalf of my colleagues, I join in extending sympathy to the people of Israel in their present suffering. Will the Minister accept that not least of that suffering, apart from the deaths and injuries that have occurred, is the knowledge that they live from day to day and from hour to hour under threat of the most horrific and random terror from Iraq? Will he convey to the Israeli Government the admiration of some of us who have criticised their policies in the past of the fact that they will not fall for the ploy of Saddam Hussein's intended retaliation?

Mr. Hogg: I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has said. As the Government of Israel will know, there have been differences between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Israel on previous occasions, but on this matter the House, the Government, feel nothing but respect and admiration for the forbearance that has been shown by the Government and people of Israel.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the Israelis have already gained much by staying out of the conflict? They have gained sympathy across the world, they have the Patriot defence system in place, and they have gained considerable understanding in Arab nations, which must be to their advantage in the long term.

Mr. Hogg: The people of Israel indeed have the respect of the British people; and I imagine that the people of Israel will also admire the fortitude that has been shown by the Arab members of the coalition, who have made it plain that, notwithstanding the brutal attack on a civilian target, they will stand firm against Saddam Hussein.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Minister accept that in a democratic country people will expect to be defended by their Government on whom there will be great pressures? Will he pay tribute to the way in which the Israeli Government have resisted deliberate political attempts to link their future with a war that was not of their making and is not of their prosecution?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady is right. The war was not of the making of the people or the Government of Israel. They have been subjected to unprovoked attacks against civilian targets. A sovereign state, the state of Israel, has the right to defend herself. The question is whether it is in her interests to retaliate, and we do not believe that it is.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Is it not right to point out that every day our young and brave pilots are trying to minimise Iraqi civilian casualties while the Iraqi

regime rain down upon innocent men, women and children death and destruction? Let us as a House salute the bravery, fortitude and restraint of the people and Government of Israel.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has drawn a very important point to the attention of the House. The allied forces—in particular, the pilots—have taken enormous care to avoid causing unnecessary civilian casualties. Indeed, the latest estimate from the Iraqis bears this out. Such cannot be said of Saddam Hussein, who has launched Scud attacks against cities. By their nature, Scud attacks are undirected and indiscriminate. This is terror bombing of civilian targets.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the Minister accept that it is for Israel's Government to decide, after listening to all advice, and on the basis of all intelligence, what to do to protect their own people? Does he accept also that it is totally unrealistic to expect the Israeli Government to allow their people to be submitted to a series of barbarous and monstrous attacks without taking retaliatory action?

Mr. Hogg: I accept that the state of Israel has a right to strike if it believes that it is necessary to do so. There is no question about that. What is at stake is whether it would be in the interests of the people of Israel to strike back. Of course, that is a matter for the Government of Israel. However, we can advise—indeed, we do advise—and we hope that the Government of Israel will respond to our advice.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Will my hon. Friend convey to the people of Israel the sense of outrage of the people of this nation, whose civilian population have suffered the horrors of indiscriminate aerial bombardment? Will he convey our feelings of solidarity with the people of Israel at this time? Will he make it clear that we are determined not just to liberate the nation of Kuwait but also to smash the Iraqi war machine, which poses such a threat to the civilian populations of both Israel and Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Hogg: This country and its people suffered the consequences of indiscriminate bombing 50 years ago. We know what it means and, therefore, our hearts go out to the people of Israel.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): I associate my colleagues and myself with the condemnation of the vicious and malicious attack that resulted in the deaths of people in Tel Aviv. May I ask the Minister, however, to reconsider his agreement in total with the statement made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)? Is he not aware that this was not an act of desperation by Saddam Hussein but, rather, a key part of a very important political strategy? However despicable we in the west may find yesterday's attack, the harsh fact of life is that it deepens and widens Saddam's support at popular level in the Arab world. Does not that demonstrate clearly the west's political weakness in failing to recognise that until we take early action to convene a middle east peace conference we shall be liable to lose the political battle for the hearts and minds of the Arab people?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point when he says that broader issues have to be tackled. They are urgent matters, and they will be tackled. It is very important indeed that the problems with regard to Palestine and the related issue of how Israel's security is to be assured be settled. The western countries will address these matters very urgently. However, they are not linked to this conflict; they are separate and distinct. We must stand on principle, and the requirement here is to remove Iraq from Kuwait absolutely.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Do not the destructive events in Tel Aviv last night provide a glaring contrast between the moral and military approach in the middle east of on the one hand the allied policy of confining action against military and strategic targets and not the civilian population—a policy that the Iraqis admit has caused only 41 fatalities to date—and on the other hand the Iraqi policy of indiscriminately hitting centres of civilian population not only in Israel but also in Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. The use of Scud missiles is the use of a terror weapon.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I entirely support the statement by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The Minister was right to say that those missiles, by their very nature, are undirected and indiscriminate. That demonstrates Saddam Hussein's lack of concern for the Israeli-Arab population in Israel. Given that Saddam Hussein still retains the ability to lauch indiscriminate attacks on Israel and the west bank and Gaza, will the Minister discuss with the Israeli ambassador in London how those prisoners who are held in the Negev desert and living in tents can be protected from indiscriminate attacks? If the Government have any spare gas masks that might fit young people under the age of 15, could they be supplied to the Israeli Government because they are having difficulty in providing masks to young Palestinians under the age of 15?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman's latter point is important and I shall reflect on it. In response to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I can say, yes indeed. We must bear in mind another interesting point. Saddam Hussein says that he is a great respecter of Muslim holy places, but we must remember that Scud missiles are perfectly capable of destroying mosques and other holy places. What credit do we give to such a man?

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Although I condemn the disgraceful attack which was borne so courageously by the Israeli people, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is very important not to get the power of the Scud missile out of all proportion? It can be countered. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree with an article in *The Times* today which pointed out that the Scud missile, rather like the Stuka dive bomber in the second world war, is as much a psychological as a military weapon? Is it not important to state that the users of Scud missiles will as assuredly be defeated as were the users of the Stuka dive bombers in the last war?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. The Scud missile can indeed be countered and, for the most part, has been countered, largely by Patriot missiles. I also agree that it is largely a psychological weapon. However, last night it

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killed three civilians, and Scud missiles have injured a large number of innocent civilians. That tells us a great deal about Saddam Hussein.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the Minister accept that, as I represent the people of Belfast who have suffered indiscriminately from terror, and the birthplace of the president of Israel, our sympathy goes out to the president and to the people of Israel at this time? Does he also accept that it is a foolish person who does what his enemy wants him to do in a conflict, and we commend the Israelis' restraint?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman who, more than most people, understands the impact of indiscriminate bombing. The people of Israel will be grateful for what has been said.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I very much hope that the Government of Israel will not play Saddam Hussein's game.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. I will allow two more questions from each side of the House and then we must make progress.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): We welcome yesterday's announcement of the setting up of the Gulf trust for the families of the service men and women who are defending freedom. Will my hon. and learned Friend today underscore our deep distress and our support for Israel during her latest trauma by offering aid to her children, perhaps through Children and Youth Aliyah, which is the children's arm of the Zionist organisation helping children in Israel? Will my hon. and learned Friend subsequently assist hon. Members like me who I know will want to go further and form some kind of a trust for the children of the people who will be our former enemies—the Iraqi children—because in the immortal lines of Bernard Shaw, "I have no enemies under seven"?

Mr. Hogg: Not only that, but we have no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Our quarrel is with Saddam Hussein and those who stand behind him. The first part of my hon. Friend's question involves detailed proposals, and I shall be very happy to discuss them with her.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Minister aware that there have been and will be many more wholly innocent victims of the escalating conflict in the middle east and that the House will wish to express its sympathy to those in that area, including those in Tel Aviv? Is he aware also that the great danger now is an escalation and extension of the conflict in which Israel and Jordan and perhaps other countries may be involved? As that represents a distinct threat to international peace and security, will he refer the latest incident to the Security Council so that it can meet to consider the full implications of what is now happening in the middle east conflict?

Mr. Hogg: That there has been an extension of the conflict is true, but the extension takes the form of Saddam Hussein attacking Israel, which country is not party to that dispute.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the indiscriminate bombing of civilians is the most baseless and deplorable action in war? Will he reaffirm that, in pursuing victory in this war, in no circumstances will the allies target civilian targets?

Mr. Hogg: Very careful instructions have been given to the commanders in the field to take great care to avoid unnecessary civilian targets and also to avoid cultural and religious sites of significance. Indeed, it is quite plain that coalition pilots have either not attacked because they thought that they might threaten such targets or have actually risked their lives to reduce the risk to those targets.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I endorse everything that has been said about the cynical and indiscriminate attacks on Israel. However, I urge the Minister and the House not to lose sight of the fact that fully 800 people have been killed by the Israelis in their oppression of territories occupied in flagrant contravention of United Nations resolutions for 23 years. In view of that, whatever happens in the aftermath of these incidents —I hope that the coalition will hang together—can our Arab allies in the coalition depend on the United Kingdom Government to press for urgent action following the resolution of the conflict to satisfy the just demands of the Palestinian people?

Mr. Hogg: We are very conscious that wider issues must be tackled. They include how one best provides for self-determination for the Palestinian people. They also include, of course, how one assures a safe and secure future for the state of Israel. They are vital matters, and we shall consider them as soon as we can.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

BILLS PRESENTED

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Secretary Wakeham, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. John Selwyn Gummer, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Mr. Colin Moynihan, presented a Bill to repeal and re-enact with amendments the Coal-Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957 and, in the Coal Industry Act 1975, section 2(4) and paragraphs 1 to 4 of Schedule 1; to make provision for imposing further obligations on the British Coal Corporation, including obligations corresponding to those voluntarily accepted by them under their code of practice concerning compensation for subsidence damage; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 63.]

Building Conversion and Energy Conservation

Mr. Robin Squire, supported by Sir Richard Body, Mr. Peter Rost, Mr. Tony Speller, Mr. Clive Soley and Mr. Terry Davis, presented a Bill to require the insulation against heat loss of dwelling units provided by the conversion of existing dwellings; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second Time on Friday 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 65.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Ordered,

That the Farm Diversification Grant (Variation) Scheme 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Points of Order

3.52 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for rising when you were on your feet. Will you acknowledge that the policy of private notice questions or ministerial statements followed by plenty of time for questions by Back-Bench Members, rather than full-blown debates at regular intervals, might be a better way for the House to respond to events in the Gulf as they unfold?

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House has a responsibility to give maximum opportunities to all Members of Parliament to participate in debates about what is happening. If nothing else, we owe that to our service men. We also have a responsibility to do so because one of the fundamental distinctions between this country and Iraq is that we actually support a parliamentary democracy.

I plead with you, Mr. Speaker, that the House must have more days to debate the issue. We must have longer time to debate statements. This afternoon we had 20 minutes to debate the attack on Israel. That is inadequate time. I strongly appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to give hon. Members a full opportunity in the coming weeks, or even months, to speak their minds on this crucial issue.

Mr. Speaker: It is a continuing situation and the hon. Gentleman has had that opportunity. He has made a speech in a recent debate. There are business questions tomorrow, and he can put his question to the Leader of the House then.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be within your recollection that at 10.30 pm yesterday a request was made by several hon. Members for a statement on not only the attack on Tel Aviv and the loss of a Tornado but on what proposals have been made, if any, to do something about the Al-Wafra oilfield which is ablaze. We asked for an answer on who will put out the fires. Are they to be allowed to damage the planet for the foreseeable future? Could you not use your influence to ask the Government to make statements on serious matters which will not wait until after the weekend?

Mr. Speaker: I allowed a private notice question today on a subject submitted to me. The matter now raised by the hon. Gentleman was not submitted.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm for my benefit and that of other people that you granted a private notice question today and that, contrary to what we were led to believe by the Leader of the House last night, the Government did not offer to make a statement? If they had done so, questions would have run for much longer and everyone who wished to speak would have been called. Will you confirm that you were restricted by the rule of the House which states that on private notice questions only six or seven hon. Members from each side should be called?

Mr. Speaker: I was in the Chair last night, but I did not hear the Leader of the House promise that a statement would be made today. He said that he would take the

[Mr. Speaker]

request into consideration. The House should understand that a private notice question is an extension of Question Time. This is a continuing situation.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall not take any more points of order. The hon. Gentleman has overstayed his welcome.

Water Requirements (Planning)

3.56 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require a person seeking planning permission for a new building to send an estimate of the annual water requirement of the building to the area water company at the same time as submitting the application for planning permission to the planning authority.

This is a conservation measure. Water literally surrounds us all. Hon. Members will be surprised, amazed or delighted to hear that they themselves are 62 per cent. water. Even on this side of the House, the dries just as much as the wets are 62 per cent. water. So it is clear that we all have a great affinity to water. Estate agents are well aware of that. They know full well that a house which overlooks the sea, a lake, a pond or a river will command a premium price. Water is attractive to us all.

However, water is considerably more valuable than simply for looking at. Indeed, in the jargon of the age, water is one of our most precious natural resources. We wash in it. We wash our cars with it. We wash our dishes and our clothes in it. We fill paddling pools with it for our children. We put it on our gardens. I believe that some people even drink it. It is because water is so popular that I hope to obtain leave to introduce my Bill today.

People say that there is plenty of water in the tap, but they do not realise how much they consume. For example, flushing a lavatory takes two gallons. Running a bath takes 18 gallons, or more if one likes to lie in the bath for a long time until the water goes cold and one must let some out and put some more hot in. A washing machine cycle takes 25 gallons of water. A typical household uses 105 gallons of water a day, while a hosepipe or sprinkler uses no less than 220 gallons an hour.

On top of that, it takes one gallon of water to make a pint of beer. It takes 100 gallons of water to make a ton of concrete. It takes 1,000 gallons of water to produce a tonne of steel and it takes 6,600 gallons of water to produce a car —although my figures do not specify whether that would be a Metro or a Rolls-Royce.

The demand for water is increasing all the time. In 1974, total use was 15,000 megalitres per day, while last year it was nearly 17,500 megalitres per day. I apologise for suddenly changing from gallons to megalitres, but it was quite beyond my capacity to convert megalitres into gallons. Besides, megalitres sounds much more impressive.

All that water must come from somewhere. It is derived from various sources, mainly boreholes, reservoirs and rivers. Such is the demand, however, that many sources are becoming seriously depleted. For example, the Rivers Allen and Piddle in Dorset and the Kennet in Berkshire are being ruined. They are beautiful, lovely, living things. What can be more beautiful than a river?

Aquifers are being pumped and, as a result, bores and springs are drying up. In Wiltshire, some bores have not run for many years—due not only to drought but to water usage. The situation is becoming intolerable.

My Bill has two objectives: first, to try to bring home to people how much water a building consumes, in the hope that, in this supposedly conservation-minded age, they will design into buildings as many water-saving devices as possible; and, secondly, to enable water authorities to plan ahead.

I have received comments from several water authorities on my proposals. South West Water supports those two main objectives. It says:

"There is no doubt of the importance of making our customers aware of the cost and value of the water required to support their proposals, and any advance information which can be provided to the water companies is extremely useful for planning purposes."

North West Water stated:

"It is helpful for customers and potential customers to be more aware of their requirements for water and, of course, we are always keen to know as soon as possible of potential new demand for our services."

Severn Trent Water stated:

"It is a very good idea, and should be extended not only to the erection of a building, but to any change or alteration in any building that requires planning permission."

Southern Water stated:

"It would be of assistance if your proposals could be extended so that notification is given also to the sewerage undertaker."

Welsh Water said:

"We have long felt that any planning applications should be formally referred to ourselves for all the obvious reasons".

Northumbria Water stated:

"Consultation with water undertakers has become more tenuous as we are no longer statutory consultees under the Town and Country Planning legislation."

It welcomed my proposed strengthening of the planning legislation.

I believe that the Bill would promote the conservation of water. It would also represent an excellent tool to enable water authorities to plan ahead. I hope that the House will give me leave to bring in my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Hugo Summerson, Mr. Thomas Graham, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Humfrey Malins, Mr. Tony Banks, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. William Hague, Mr. Geraint Howells, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. Andrew Welsh and Mr. Tony Favell.

WATER REQUIREMENTS (PLANNING)

Mr. Hugo Summerson accordingly presented a Bill to require a person seeking planning permission for a new building to send an estimate of the annual water requirement of the building to the area water company at the same time as submitting the application for planning permission to the planning authority: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April and to be printed. [Bill 58.]

Orders of the Day

Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

SUBSTITUTED AMOUNTS: COLLECTION FUND

'( ) (1) The following section shall be inserted after section 35 of the 1988 Act—

"35a.—(1) For the purposes of Section 35(5) above, where the Secretary of State determines to make an order in respect of a charging or precepting authority under sections 104(2) or 106(2) below, as a result of which it is required to set a substitute amount under section 35(4) above, he shall, before laying a draft of any such order under sections 104(8) or 106(4), lay before Parliament an estimate of the losses likely to be incurred to the collection fund of any authority referred to in such an order as a result of the setting by it of a substituted amount.

(2) Any estimate laid before Parliament under subsection (1) above shall be notified to the authority concerned.

(3) Any estimate laid under subsection (1) above shall have regard to any information received from the authority regarding sums likely to be received by it in respect of its community charges by the date on which the order is expected to be laid.

(4) In laying any estimate under this section, the Secretary of State shall specify—

(a) an estimate of the additional community charge in the following financial year likely to result from the losses estimated under subsection (1) above; and

(b) a schedule of the reductions in services which the Secretary of State considers the authority would be likely to be required to make equivalent to any such loss".'.

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.4 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We have tabled the new clause because we cannot separate the Bill from the shambles of the Government's policy on the poll tax and poll tax capping generally. It is designed to deal with the situation arising out of a substitute bill to be set by the Government consequent on a capping order. We now know from the statement of the Secretary of State last Thursday that the bills that will go out next year will be related directly to the rates that were previously set. The formula involves a £104 difference between the old rates and the assumed bill for the current year plus whatever is levied by the local authorities for the coming financial year.

The Secretary of State not only controls the "assumed" bills but, under the capping arrangements, he controls the bills that will go out next April. He controls both future and present arrangements. It should be left to the authority to try to justify the charge that it thinks should be levied in relation to a given level of services, which the Government are to determine for each individual authority.

Matters are made far worse by the fact that the standard spending assessment formulas which the Secretary of State confirmed on Thursday will be

[Mr. David Blunkett]

unchanged, are universally acknowledged to be flawed. The assessment of need, the distribution of grants, the fixing of bills and the determination of capping are all in the hands of a Government who decline under the present Bill to take into account known information that would allow logical decisions to be made about the level of services and the raising of cash to contribute to the collection fund. That is why I described the Government's policy as a shambles. I would have called it a dog's dinner, but the dog takes offence at such remarks.

Things would not be so bad if the Government were willing to accept the new clause, thus acknowledging that those who are in control of decision-making should recognise the need to obtain the maximum up-to-date information on which to base their decisions. The new clause would require them to do that. The Government want to take responsibility for the benefits, as they see them, of poll tax capping and for the new relief scheme, but they do not want to take responsibility for the circumstances relating to the collection fund and consequently for the cuts involved in capped authorities and their effects on residents and citizens.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman referred to a shambles and to decisions that have to be made by decision-makers. Will he comment on the shambles in many Labour-controlled authorities, one of which is Islington? A QC's report on Islington council said:

"Having the cash office staffed by the innumerate, the filing done by the dyslexic and disorganised, and reception by the surly or charmless seems to us a recipe for administrative chaos."

That is where the chaos surrounding the community charge really lies—with Labour local authorities which could not organise a celebration in a brewery. Will the hon. Gentleman now address the real problem?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that some Conservative Members know more about celebrations in breweries and the consequences for their party funds than they do about decentralised offices in Islington. I might put on record in relation to Islington the fact that the Prime Minister made a remark yesterday, in answer to questions about empty housing in Islington, which was grossly inaccurate. Islington has one of the best records in London on vacancies; they now run at less than 2 per cent., which compares extremely favourably with the operation of Government Departments.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) quoted counsel's opinion on a collection office in Islington which stated that it was manned by people who were innumerate and dyslexic. I believe that he was using the terms in a derogative fashion. Will my hon. Friend confirm that "dyslexic" describes people who have a medical condition and is not a term of insult?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. I hope that the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) will withdraw that. Although none of us wants circumstances in which those who are operating decentralised offices are alleged to be innumerate, all of us accept that dyslexia is an educational medical condition, but that it can be overcome, as Conservative Members well know. I give credit to those who have overcome the problem, not least on the Government Benches.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman asked me to withdraw what I said. I do not think that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) understood my point. I was not making disparaging remarks about dyslexics. I was quoting a report by a Queen's counsel on the way in which Islington council chooses to organise its affairs. Whatever one may say about the handicaps of dyslexics, to put them in charge of operations such as filing seems a curious way to help them. It is the condemnation of the Labour council which matters. That is the point to which the hon. Gentleman should respond, but which he will seek to avoid.

Mr. Blunkett: It is not a point that I seek to avoid. I made it clear that people who are innumerate should not be dealing with the administration of area offices, whether or not QCs have done an investigation. Dyslexia does not come into it, whether it is in the Department of the Environment or a decentralised office in Islington. I take considerable offence at the idea that the two conditions are synonymous.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman referred to the Prime Minister's remarks yesterday about housing in Islington. In the light of what he said, will he comment on the eight flats rented from private landlords by the council at great expense—using Government money—which were kept empty by the council for between 40 and 83 weeks? Is that how the council uses Government money to help homeless people?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is being very generous in giving way. I am sure that he will not be deflected from new clause 1.

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly will not.

Lettings, whether on a leasing arrangement that is being set aside or direct from the housing revenue account, are not the responsibility of the House. There is a direct relationship between the electors of the borough and those they elect. The point of the new clause is that those who have responsibility should be accountable for the decisions that they take. Through the clause, we seek to ensure that those who have the temerity to take decisons about poll tax levels, capping provisions and the necessary resources to meet a given level of service should be accountable for their decisions and should seek the maximum information on which to base their decisions.

Otherwise—I come back to where I left off earlier—the Government will be happy to take responsibility for fixing the poll tax and cuts in general, but will not be happy to take responsibility and to be held accountable for the misery caused by the cuts that they inflict on the electorate of for the confusion and administrative difficulty that they cause to authorities.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The hon. Gentleman mentioned manifestos. Which Labour-controlled authority included in its manifesto the figure that it was going to charge in ensuing years, if elected to office, so that community charge payers knew what they were voting for in monetary terms?

Mr. Blunkett: In London and the metropolitan areas, the poll tax is fixed in February or March. The bills are sent out at the beginning of April, and—unlike central Government—the elected representatives have the temerity to stand for election each year at the beginning of May. There can be no more direct relationship between the bills sent and the judgment of local citizens than that. I am amazed that Conservative Members do not know how the system works——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

4.15 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I am delighted to give way to the hon. Lady, who will make an outstanding contribution that will enlighten her fellow Tory Members on how the system works.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman may be right that there is a relationship under some unitary authorities, but he is wrong about authorities such as mine. The county council spends 9p in every 10p, so there is precious little for local district authorities to do once the money has been blued by the county council.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman does not care about that.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman says that I do not care about that; I care greatly about it. We have proposals to improve the operation of local democracy: annual elections in local authorities, the development of unitary government, giving people clear responsibility by removing capping, sensible standard spending assessments and needs systems, reinstating equalisation between different local authorities. All these would introduce direct accountability and would help the hon. Lady's electors to make a direct judgment on what was happening in their area.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I was most interested in the hon. Gentleman's list of proposals for the future of local government. Will he come and discuss them with the Secretary of State and me?

Mr. Blunkett: I repeat what I and my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) have often said: we are happy to hold discussions on this issue if the Secretary of State will accept the simple principle that the poll tax should be abolished. I welcome the interventions this afternoon, not least because they reveal the paucity of knowledge among Conservative Members, who appear extremely concerned by the clause, which merely seeks to ensure that information is available to Ministers when they make their decisions and that they are held accountable by local electorates for what they do.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's courtesy in giving way so often on this point. I am worried by his complete failure to mention any funding commitments by a future Labour Government. Last July the hon. Gentleman condemned the £3 billion increase in external funding as "peanuts". If that was peanuts, by how much would a future Labour Government increase funding? Will he answer that in a straightforward way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will find it somewhat difficult to answer that question within the confines of new clause 1.

Mr. Blunkett: I would find it as difficult to answer that question as hon. Members would have found it difficult eight days ago to guess how much the Secretary of State was going to get from the Treasury or from cuts in public services to make up the extra £1 billion. I am glad that the Conservatives are pouring money into the system to try to hold down the poll tax—not just because it helps people, but because it will make our lives a great deal easier when we transfer to a modern property tax based on ability to pay. It will certainly make much easier my arguments and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham with the new Chancellor when we take office.

I return to the Bill. I was simply saying that cuts in services will be initiated by the Government, not only by capping authorities but by using a formula of A minus B minus C over D instead of using the relevant information that is available at the time and taking into account changes that have occurred between the original decision on capping and the order laid for the individual authority's poll tax. Those things are important because, for every £1 that cannot be raised towards the collection fund, £1 of cuts must be made in local authority services or be carried over into the following financial year. This must be picked up by local taxpayers, sometimes entailing the need to borrow; charges are incurred on the borrowing and this pushes up the actual charge necessary to meet what would have been the previous poll tax or local authority tax. The position is made much worse.

In other words, the Bill is ill-timed, unnecessary and out of date not only because of the Government's change of heart towards the poll tax, but because of last Thursday's statement. Since the conclusion of Standing Committee F, therefore, we have even more reason to reject the Bill and to carry this new clause, which seeks to make some sense of what is before us.

It is clear that we must ask the Government to justify what they are doing. When we did so in Committee we had some interesting replies. The Under-Secretary of State said:

> "All authorities must make their best estimate of income and expenditure at the beginning of a year and live with the consequences".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 15 January 1990; c. 108.]

Who would disagree with that? But, of course, once the authority has been capped, the situation changes. If the authority has taken into account all the circumstances and has made all the necessary adjustments, it will be ruled out of order.

The Bill deals with the sort of position in which Lambeth found itself when it made a calculation based on its circumstances. Lambeth also made a calculation of what would happen if it was tax-capped. When it went to the High Court, it won. We are debating this Bill on Report and Third Reading and moving the new clause precisely because Lambeth won the case. It was adjudged to have taken due care in its decisions and to have properly weighed the information available to it at the stage to which the Under-Secretary of State referred.

That made us wonder whether everyone who supported the Bill really understood what it was about and what it was intended to do.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman makes it sound as though Lambeth council is a well-organised London borough. Will he confirm that Lambeth council could not send poll tax bills to people earlier than the day before the local elections in May? Can he say whether many people in Lambeth have received their bills from the council? It is our understanding that most people in Lambeth are still waiting for their bills. Lambeth council is in chaos.

Mr. Blunkett: Whatever the rights and wrongs of the debate about the effectiveness of services in Lambeth, the council can hardly be blamed for not sending out the bills by 1 April, consequent on the decision of the Government to cap it. If the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) examines the logistics of the position, he will be forced to conclude that the best that Lambeth could do was to announce what figure it intended to levy if it were free to do so. The electors in Lambeth made their decision precisely on those figures, with the debate in the House still to take place and with a court judgment on the validity of the Government's action also pending.

Everybody knew about Lambeth's bill because the Government made their best efforts to publicise what it would be and what their substitute setting would be. Therefore, a clear judgment could be made about whether to accept the Government's bill or that of Lambeth council. People made that judgment and voted Labour, and no one can cast aside the result of a clear democratic election that was held only a few weeks after the decision to set the poll tax had been publicised.

In Committee, the Under-Secretary of State said:

"All authorities are in the same boat."

That is the flagship that is rapidly sinking. He said:

"Opposition Members are trying to put capped authorities in a boat by themselves".

It would have been appropriate for the Minister to say "a lifeboat". He continued:

"But there is no justification for that. There is no reason why a capped authority should have an opportunity that is not available to other authorities to reconsider matters such as its estimate of non-collection when resetting its charges after capping."

As I said, Lambeth council had an opportunity to weigh up the information available to it before capping and at the point at which it set its poll tax. That was upheld by the court and the Bill deals precisely with that situation by disqualifying the council. Far from us trying to get capped authorities into a lifeboat, which in other circumstances and in another connotation we would seek to do, we are trying to ensure that capped authorities are on all fours about being able to use the information that is available to them.

Mr. Key: I do not wish to be the tail that wags the hon. Gentleman's dog. I know that he is scrupulously fair: if he reads on in column 109, he will find that I said:

"Moreover, it is clear that under the present statute a capped authority cannot change its non-collection estimate to allow for the fact that it has been capped. Haringey tried to do that this year when it reset its charge after capping, but that was subsequently quashed by the divisional court."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 15 January 1991; c. 108-9.]

Once again the Opposition are confusing the existing statute with the Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: We are not confused and we have shown that not only by our interventions and contributions but by the words that I read to the House. We understand very well what we are trying to do. In this somewhat limited and irrelevant Bill, we are trying to prevent the Government from having the power to set poll tax levels without using the necessary information and without making sensible judgments about the impact on the collection fund and, consequently, on the following year's poll tax or on the cuts that will have to be made. In Committee, we went into detail on matters that would affect those judgments.

The level of the collection fund will be affected by the precept that is levelled by the precepting authorities and by the national non-domestic rate pool which draws on the collection fund. Of course, it will also be affected by section 95(4) of the 1988 Act, which deals with withdrawal of the local authority's general fund requirements, and by how much is collected. We made a substantial case, and shall make it again, about the importance of bearing in mind when making decisions the consequences of capping itself. Those who cap should be wary of enforcing algebraic formulae on authorities that have to live with the consequences. If collection rates are affected by a delay that inevitably occurs because of capping, it should be taken into account. It is common sense to recognise that collection rates can and will be affected.

The Government do not have to take our word for it, or even the word of local authorities. We know that the Audit Commission is concerned about the difficulty in some areas of collection, such as the 4 million people who are at the bottom income levels and who are charged the minimum poll tax. There is also the question of those who move house and who local authorities, particularly in inner-city areas, are endeavouring to chase for their poll tax payments. In other words, depending on the area of the country, the 10 to 40 per cent. turnover rate in the locality will have a substantial effect. In my authority, between the date at which the relevant population was asssessed and the beginning of the financial year there has been a 6·3 per cent. population change.

4.30 pm

We also pointed out that it was important to understand the difference between the "relevant population" and the "equated population". In a council such as Haringey, it made a difference of £1 million in income—a substantial amount for day nurseries, nursery schooling, home helps and meals on wheels. These things matter greatly, especially in an authority which had to make cuts of £28 million to get within the capping criteria in the first place. The amount that would come off poll tax this year in Haringey was affected by about £6; it would have been £70·70 for the relevant population and £64·30 for the equated population, making a difference of £1 million in terms of neglect. The consequences had to be dealt with not by Ministers but by local councillors struggling to make the budget balance.

That is why we tabled the new clause. We want the maximum information about what is happening to the collection fund and its likely outturn, a matter that we would expect any local authority to take into account. This is called fiduciary duty. Under the 1988 Act, local authorities have something called a whistleblower. We would like a whistleblower on Conservative Members. Time is up for the poll tax and the way in which Conservative Members have colluded with a lie. It is a lie that one can enhance democracy by taking it away; that one can increase accountability by removing it from local

people and their elected representatives and by taking responsibility but then trying to shift the blame on to the shoulders of local councillors.

The Government want to have the best of both worlds. They want capping, the poll tax and the gerrymandering of bills as a result of last week's announcement, and they want cuts. They want all this without having to deal directly with the consequences and without having to spell out, as we ask in the new clause, the consequences of the expected cuts. They are oblivious of the long-term increase in the poll tax because of the deficiency on the collection fund. For all those reasons, I ask all hon. Members to vote for the new clause.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I oppose new clause 1, not on any ideological account and not because I do not take seriously the interesting and demanding questions posed by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). Indeed, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's great courtesy in giving way so many times. The only reason I did not ask him to give way was that I wanted to make a slightly longer series of points in response to his comments.

The hon. Member for Brightside referred to the fact that this was a fundamental platform. He pointed out that every £1 capped equalled a cut of £1. That presupposes both perfect efficiency in every local authority and a level of service throughout that is constant. That would then achieve the result suggested by the hon. Gentleman—every £1 capped would equal £1 of cuts.

Of course, we know that that is not true. That has not happened. In September last year, the National Association of Local Government Officers conducted a survey of the capped authorities, and the union-owned newspaper *Public Service* reported that Basildon had said that no redundancies were anticipated; Brent had said that no cuts were required as a result of capping; Bristol had said that there would be no redundancies, no cuts in services and no charge increases; Calderdale had said that it was holding growth, increasing some charges and cutting some non-essential services; and Camden had said that no cuts were necessary. The cap was £4·4 million, but Camden council said:

"Our income is sufficient for us not to need to make cuts."

Greenwich said that some redundancies were expected, but that there would be no large-scale job cuts, and Lambeth said that it had managed to avoid closure of front-line services and that there would be no redundancies.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Lady is reading out an interesting list——

Miss Nicholson: I have a longer one.

Mr. Illsley: In that case, perhaps the hon. Lady will tell us what the list says about my authority, Barnsley, and what cuts it had to make.

Miss Nicholson: I do not intend to list the cuts, results of cuts, or results of capping for every hon. Member's local council. Of course, if I did it would not take too long, as there are so few Opposition Members present for a debate about a matter which they claim causes them great concern.

I was not at all surprised by that survey. The hon. Member for Brightside should not be surprised either, despite his bland statement that every £1 capped should equal £1 of cuts. The reason why I was not surprised is that I have had practical job experience working both inside and alongside local authorities, be they district councils, county councils or that great departed monolith whose death I welcomed and whose funeral pyre I should have liked to light myself, the Greater London council.

My work with local authorities was during my pre-parliamentary years, when I worked in industry, in business and in the voluntary sector. I well recall the appalling shock that I received, as someone who believed in the high level of services that local authorities were supposed to provide—I knew less then and I was more naive about the massive incompetence in some of the geographical areas—when I went to the GLC to do a job for the computer industry. You are highly computer-literate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so you will know that it is crucial that different forms of machinery and different forms of software interlock—*[Interruption.]* Of course Mr. Deputy Speaker is computer literate; everybody with a farming constituency is computer literate these days.

I was genuinely shocked, in a real professional sense, when I discovered that the GLC had made massive incompetent investment in four different mainframe manufacturers, none of whose equipment or software was compatible at that time. The GLC had four huge teams of staff, each pursuing different sorts of machinery and software and trying to carry out different sorts of task. I found that a professional abomination and I was deeply shocked. It was because of the GLC's incompetence that the company for which I was working as a general consultant was called in to do one of the simplest jobs of all—to create a computerised payroll for part of the GLC organisation. Although it appears funny retrospectively, I did not find it amusing at the time when I asked for some software manuals for a particular part of the job and the staff were absolutely astounded. They opened a cupboard, and out fell a load of empty whisky bottles. Such was the enormous competence of the GLC.

Subsequently, when I was in the voluntary agency field, I worked alongside social services department people and I recognised with great sadness the enormous disparity in the level of services that they were able to supply—not, I hasten to add, because of their desire to provide less than efficient services, but because of their incompetence in some areas and in certain parts of the country. There is great disparity in levels of competence. That is where new clause 1 comes in.

In the course of his speech, the hon. Member for Brightside made the discredited comment that every £1 capped equalled £1 of cuts. This has clearly not happened in the past 12 months and never will, given these disparities of service. It presupposes perfect efficiency in every local authority.

Subsection (4)(a) of the new clause demands that the Secretary of State shall specify

"an estimate of the additional community charge in the following financial year likely to result from the losses estimated under section (1) above."

In the cases of the seven district councils that I have listed which had charge capping last year and where no cuts resulted, I suggest that the Secretary of State would be offering a nil forecast. He would be offering a nil forecast because capping has meant that councils have been forced to look again at their incompetence and inefficiency and have been forced to tighten their belts.

Mr. Holt: Would my hon. Friend like to speculate what the Labour-controlled authorities would be doing with all

[Mr. Holt]

that money that they would have had without charge capping? They have not had to cut any services, so what would they have done if they had managed to get their grubby hands on all that money?

Miss Nicholson: I am very sorry to say that we would have had even higher staff levels in those local authorities and even slower provision of services to the electorate outside. As we all know, when one builds up a so-called core of administration, even with the best well-meaning people, the line between the centre and the elected gets slower and slower in achievement.

I hope that the Minister will consider this seriously. I believe that we should go further than just putting in agency provisions for the delivery of Government services; we should go out to private companies, put them under stringent rules and allow them to provide the services, which they will do at perhaps half the cost incurred by so many of our local authorities at present.

The hon. Member for Brightside suggested—and I wholly support him—that those who take the decisions should be accountable. Those were his very words, but he related those words to the Government. He suggested that those who take the decision to charge-cap should be accountable to the electorate. I suggest that the Conservative philosophy reflects those words in local authority action. The local authority should be accountable. From the Conservative perspective, these caps are only a method of creating local accountability. Indeed, as we have seen from the figures I have read out, this has in some measure already occurred.

The hon. Member cannot say that we tell a lie—that is a word I would not normally use in this place—about enhancing democracy by taking it away. We have, in fact, enhanced democracy. Yes, we have done so with some difficulty; yes, with some elements that I cannot support; and yes, with some points that I know we are already clearing up and others that need further clearing up. Nevertheless, we have increased democracy and we have brought closer to the people of the United Kingdom the decision making which should be theirs alone—the decision making undertaken on their behalf by local authorities. We have given them the ability to call the tune. There has been no gerrymandering of bills and there may have been a misunderstanding of that word.

Finally, I question the still confused thinking that has been displayed by Opposition Members about the operations of local democracy. I was fascinated to see the utter dichotomy, the contradiction in terms, offered by the hon. Member for Brightside when he called both for the removal of SSAs and for the equalisation of local authorities. He is speaking against himself, because the point of SSAs is to equalise the services offered throughout the United Kingdom. One cannot have equalisation of local authorities without some form of redistribution of income, and SSAs offer a moderately simple way of doing that.

Incidentally, I do not necessarily pay tribute to the eternal values of equalisation of services throughout the United Kingdom. I believe that we may have gone too far on that one. Nevertheless, I call into question the hon. Member's illogicality, which I am sure he does not intend, when he offers two opposing aspects and suggests that they reach one solution.

4.45 pm

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Lady said that charge capping enhanced democracy and increased accountability. Surely charge capping has done just the opposite. If the Conservative Government had wanted to increase accountability, they would have allowed the electorate to decide on the poll tax bills of the charge-capped authorities. That is the idea of accountability; it is not just a matter of the Government imposing on these local authorities a poll tax which they then have to sell. The hon. Lady also said that SSAs equalise resources. If that is so, why does Manchester get more money to pay for its standard level of services than many other metropolitan districts such as Westminster?

Miss Nicholson: I agree that in a perfect world we could give complete freedom to local authorities to set their own bills and allow complete freedom to the electorate to turn out those local authorities which failed to deliver the services at the sorts of costs people require. However, as the Opposition's Front-Bench spokesman himself said recently, if a Labour Government were in power they would consider keeping some sort of power in reserve for something like a charge-capping exercise.

Mr. Blunkett *rose*——

Miss Nicholson: I will give way to the hon. Member when I have finished making this point. The shadow Environment Secretary who was the predecessor to the hon. Member for Brightside said that, in extremis, there must always be that reserve power. He made that statement on Radio 4 on 27 March 1990. The shadow Environment Secretary before him stated in *Hansard:*

"the Labour party's policy makes it clear that what the Government provide to local authorities would, of necessity, be controlled and limited"—[*Official Report,* 18 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 1218]

I agree that in a perfect world there would not need to be these controls and limits. I suggest that it is a mere short-term view, simply because of the profligacy of some of the Labour councils which has been so appalling that one shudders to think what the poorer members of society would suffer if these councils were allowed to go full tilt down the road of massive expenditure.

Mr. Blunkett: I simply want to put the record straight, and there is no point in not doing it now. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made it clear that his remarks which the hon. Lady has mentioned, on Radio 4's "Today" programme, referred to propriety and financial probity. The Labour party's position is unequivocal. We will not introduce capping for local revenue raised and spent by a local authority, as distinct from Government grant which in all circumstances has, by its very nature, to be determined by the Government.

Miss Nicholson: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to go a little further down the path, although I had in fact finished. The former shadow Environment Secretary went on to say:

"It is really just a hypothetical question to ask us to define what would be extreme circumstances. What I am saying to you—I am not ducking your question in any sense—I am saying in extremis the reserve power would have to be reserved but that it is impossible to say in advance what those circumstances would be".

In other words, the Labour party has no policy. It has failed to recognise honourably and honestly that it is

Labour councils which overspend in a way that is unacceptable to the electorate. Labour councils spend on themselves in terms of their central staffing, central comforts and they do not give to the electorate those things that the electorate deserves.

I cannot support new clause 1 or the Labour party's policy on the community charge. I look to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to his most able Ministers to deliver the right and proper answers within the Conservative philosophy.

Mr. Illsley: I support new clause 1 and, in view of what I said in Committee, I hope to keep my remarks brief.

It is not that some authorities are profligate and overspend; it is simply that the Government have imposed on them standard spending assessments which are deliberately low to force them into a situation where they can easily be charge-capped under the Government's current criteria. In Committee, the Opposition showed clearly that the SSAs bore no relation to the needs of any particular authority.

I was interested to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) about a newspaper published by the National and Local Government Officers Association which I think she said was produced last September. Barnsley is still making cuts as a result of last year's charge capping of which the newspaper probably would not be aware.

New clause 1 requires the Secretary of State to estimate losses that are likely to be carried forward for the forthcoming year. The formula as it stands in the Bill simply passes the result of any charge capping on to the poll tax payer in the following financial year, and no account is taken of the shortfall despite the fact that that information is available at the time of the charge capping. It is nonsense that the Government should force authorities to issue bills which the Government and the local authorities know are ridiculous because they do not take account of the information that is available to the authority at the time. The public do not want that shortfall being stored up for the following year.

For example, in 1990-91 Barnsley allocated 6 per cent. of its poll tax bill to cover any shortfall in the collection of the tax, and that was detailed on the bill. There is considerable resentment among charge payers in my authority because they are expected to pay £16·97 to cover what they look upon as defaulters. Complaints to me and in the local press are now building up from people who refuse to pay that sum. They will pay the rest of the poll tax bill, but they are not prepared to pay for someone who defaults. They do not realise that similar problems existed under the rating system. That is causing problems for the local authority.

It is not just ordinary working people who object, but the business community as well—perhaps more so. They tend to look on people who are unable to pay as shirkers, just as Conservative Members do, although that is not necessarily the case. One can imagine the disgust of charge payers in my local authority if they had to make up a shortfall of more than 6 per cent. That is simply increasing the number of refusals to pay the poll tax and placing an extra burden on the local authority. People are deciding to pay simply a proportion of the poll tax and to withhold the £16·97. Therefore, my local authority is having to send out extra bills, obtain court orders and all the rest simply because people are refusing to pay that 6 per cent. It shows that people do not want such sums stored up for the forthcoming year but would far rather have their bills sorted out logically in the current year when the capping is implemented.

If the Secretary of State is required to lay such an estimate of losses, the local authority can identify what it will be required to make up in the following year. It is obviously sensible for a local authority which knows that it will be short on its collection funds to take that into account at the time of capping. It is crazy simply to tell local authorities that, although it is known that they have a 10 per cent. shortfall in their collection funds, nothing can be done about it in June, July, August or September, and it must wait till the following year.

Again, that reflects on the SSAs, which appear not to have been altered to any great extent this year compared with last year. My authority still has the same problems and we shall have similar problems with capping. All we are doing is building up problems for the future. We are simply creating a situation in which authorities that were capped originally will be capped in the future.

New clause 1 requires the Secretary of State to specify the proposed increase in the charge. I have some sympathy with that because charge payers coming to my surgeries do not want to hear about aggregate external finance or increases in revenue support grant which, incidentally, are about 1·9 per cent. Most of the £3 billion spoken about this year is coming through non-domestic rating, not through increases in Government grant. What they want to know is what the increase will be in pounds, not in percentages here, there and everywhere.

New clause 1 also requires a schedule of reductions in services. Again, I have considerable sympathy with that. I have to laugh when I hear stories about whisky bottles in cupboards and all the rest. It is obvious that some Conservative Members are living in a dream world. My authority comes under the Audit Commission and is regulated by the same legislation as are all other authorities. My authority is a diligent one, which abides by the rules and regulations laid down. Authorities referred to by Conservative Members do not seem to come under the same legislation. Why are not complaints made about those profligate authorities? Some of the stories related by Conservative Members are incredible.

When an authority sets a sensible budget and when treasurers, heads of department and all the rest have spent considerable time determining their budget for the coming year, agonising over it for two or three months, how can they simply cut £10 million off it, as Barnsley was required to do? Which services should be cut? My area was not guilty of high spending and there was no waste, yet cuts had to be made in every department—small cuts here, there and everywhere, except in education, where the cuts were massive. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West, who is no longer in her place, referred to authorities that had not had to make employees redundant as a result of charge capping. I assure her that some education centres in Barnsley were closed as a direct result of charge capping.

It is not good enough for the Government simply to tell a local authority that it is being capped and that, say, £10 million must be taken out of its budget. The Government should be obliged to indicate to the authority how the £10 million might be saved. But they do not do that. They know that some local authorities, such as the

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one in my area, simply cannot cut spending without reducing services. They know that authorities, in setting their budgets, have acted responsibly.

It should be remembered that the Manchesters, the Bradfords, the Wandsworths and the Westminsters get double the amount of money that Barnsley gets to provide services at the same level. Why does Manchester get twice as much as the local authority in my area to provide the same services? It is absolutely ridiculous.

The Government are abdicating their responsibility. They do not know where the cuts could be made. They themselves could not do the job. The whole idea of charge capping is a sham, because it is based on the sham standard spending assessment.

5 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I shall try to make my comments brief, as other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I shall confine myself to the new clause.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said that those who take decisions should be made accountable. That is exactly what new clause 1 seeks to do. It seeks to make the Government accountable for what they are forcing upon local authorities. If the hon. Lady and her colleagues are so keen on this mechanism, it is odd that they are resisting this new clause, which specifically addresses the fact that the Bill provides the Secretary of State with strengthened powers by giving him the right, in effect, to decide a local authority's poll tax as well as its budget. That is true of all local authorities that the Secretary of State chooses to charge-cap.

This is an ironic twist, bearing in mind what the present Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to *The Times* in May 1990:

"Local authorities should be free to set and account for their own budgets."

But the Government are seeking to take that right away from the local authorities. They know that the task that has been set is impossible, and they do not wish themselves, as the Government, to be held accountable for extremely difficult decisions.

New clause 1 refers specifically to difficulties in respect of the collection fund. It would oblige the Secretary of State to specify the services that a local authority area was likely to lose. If he was unable or was not prepared to identify the cuts, he would be required to specify the deficit that would have to be carried forward and would result in an increase in poll tax in the following financial year. The Government are not prepared to give an estimate or to take into consideration the difficulties that local authorities have to face.

In Bristol, whose council is one of the authorities that the hon. Lady quoted, the Government are requiring a cut of £21 million in the expenditure for next year. Bearing in mind the fact that the total expenditure figure is £62 million, anybody who believes that a reduction of £21 million will be achieved without loss of services and loss of jobs is clearly living in cloud cuckoo land. Let us look at the experience in Bristol this year. Let us consider the information that we should wish the Secretary of State to take into account when identifying cuts. The poll tax is proving to be almost impossible to collect. The Audit Commission, when studying collection and looking at the collection fund, investigated a number of authorities, of which Bristol city council was one. Thus we have up-to-date information on the problems of that local authority.

In Bristol, administration of the poll tax costs £18·22 per head of the adult population. The Audit Commission estimated that the figure should be £14. The difference is accounted for by the fact that the council had to find new offices for the increased number of staff needed to deal with the poll tax. That has been carried forward. In addition, the authority has to pay the collection charge and giro costs. The administration charge for the rates was £7·35 per head. In addition, as a result of charge capping, court appeals and the endless rebilling that has been necessary——

Mr. Holt: Would the hon. Lady care to say whether she has paid her own charge this year? If not, by how much does she estimate she has burdened other people as a result of failure to conform with the law?

Ms. Primarolo: I intend to apply to myself the discipline of sticking to the new clause, even if other hon. Members cannot do so. I should be happy, at another time and in a relevant debate, to discuss with the hon. Gentleman the invidious effects of the poll tax on my constituents and on many others who are unable to pay. Pensioners, despite an increase in their pensions, are worse off because they have lost even the small amount of relief that was available.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Primarolo: No. It is well known in this House that I am not frightened by the bullying of hon. Members on the Government Benches. I intend to persist with the speech on new clause 1 that I rose to make. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to have a discussion outside the Chamber, I shall be delighted.

In Bristol, 100,000 people have not paid their poll tax, and in that figure I include those who are in arrears. The local authority is pursuing them in the magistrates court at the rate of 3,000 summonses twice a week for liability orders. That clearly shows that many people find the tax unpayable and that others refuse to pay it. That makes the poll tax uncollectable. Local authorities cannot provide the Government with the information to show how they can comply with the Government's spending directives to balance their books.

There are particular problems in university cities such as Bristol. In such areas problems arise in calculating bills. Even when students pay only 20 per cent. of their bills, the calculation for students in the formula creates problems. Amended bills for students were issued after court action and appeals and they arrived after the academic year had finished. Many people had delayed paying their bills because they were waiting for the outcome of the action and they left the area after the academic year ended. Local authorities cannot trace those people, because that would pose enormous administrative problems and involve great expense.

New clause 1 is straightforward. The Opposition's view of the poll tax is well known. We believe that it is an undemocratic and vile tax and that people's taxes should be based on their ability to pay. The local authority in Bristol will have to take hard decisions to find the £21 million-worth of cuts in services that the Government have directed the authority to make.

If the new clause is accepted, the idea that those who take the decisions should be accountable for them will not be the hollow rhetoric that is normally uttered by the Government. The new clause will make the concept real because the Secretary of State will have to take responsibility for his directives. He will have to specify, when making the orders, how the cuts can be achieved and what services will be lost. Therefore, my constituents will know who is accountable for the cuts in services—the Government.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My colleagues and I will vote in favour of the new clause if it is forced to a vote. We oppose the Bill because we oppose the poll tax. The poll tax is a predictable nonsense. It fails to do the one thing that the Government most wanted it to do because it has not increased accountability, particularly as capping has been introduced. Accountability and capping are contradictory concepts.

No amendment to the poll tax system will lead to accountability. There will be no accountable system until local government is reformed properly. This is not the right occasion to expand in detail on what would make the system accountable. Suffice it to say that we should have a system under which the people who are elected to local government reflect the views of the electorate. In 1982, Islington borough council had 51 Labour members and one non-Labour member when Labour received only 50 per cent. of the vote. That is the greatest distortion of the local government system that I can recall in recent times.

We should have a system of local government that accurately reflects what people want in respect of the political colour of their local authority, and people should pay a reasonable amount according to their ability to pay. I support that concept, and my colleagues and I have taken up the Secretary of State's invitation and we have argued for and answered questions on the concept of local income tax as an alternative to the poll tax. When the whole saga of the poll tax ends, I believe that we will have a local income tax system. That was the proposal put forward by Layfield many years ago; it is the idea that my colleagues and I have supported for a decade or more and it is the proposal put forward by many people who have no political affiliations.

5.15 pm

The aim of the Bill is to plug the Lambeth loophole. If we are to have this system for another year, it is appropriate that we should know the implications of capping in terms of an authority's loss of finance. The amount that a local authority receives and the amount that it loses as a result of poll tax capping is worse under the present system than it was under the rate capping system. Under rate capping, the cap was imposed before the beginning of the financial year, and at least a local authority began in April knowing what its budget was. The present system is nonsense: a local authority sets its budget, begins the financial year and, sometimes months later, through no fault of its own, it is told what it can spend.

In those circumstances, capped authorites such as Southwark have to examine their budgets and cut services. That is nonsense, and it is unjustifiable if we believe that there should be a logical system of financial planning for local authority members or their officers.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in contrast to what he has just said, the Government have made it clear in advance what local authorities would need to do in the forthcoming year if they were to be capped? To that extent, much of the uncertainty no longer exists.

Mr. Hughes: I accept that the conditions have been improved. However, the law still permits that a charge cap can, and will, be imposed after April and that might not be exactly on all fours with the predictions and assumptions. However, I accept that the Government have tried to mitigate the effect of an authority being in the dark at the end of March and setting a budget with only a vague idea from on high of what might happen. At least that will be better.

The number of people who do not pay the poll tax is relevant. I understand that the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) has not paid her poll tax. No doubt she will correct me if I am wrong. She avoided answering the intervention of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). However much we may dislike the poll tax, it is unjustifiable for people on a parliamentary salary not to pay the poll tax. Local authorities will spent a lot of money chasing after the poll tax and public money is thereby wasted. By any definition, hon. Members can afford to pay the poll tax, because we are among the best paid in the land. Although we may not like the system, we have not brought the system down by not paying the poll tax. Not paying has simply added to the reduction in services for people who are considerably worse off than anyone in this House.

The Audit Commission stated that in general there are two classes of local authority. In one class there are authorities with relatively static populations in which collection rates are high. In the other class of authorities, of which Southwark is one, population turnover is high. In Southwark, the population turnover rate is about 25 per cent. a year. Obviously the whole population does not turn round in four years, but about 25 per cent. of the population enter and leave the area every year. In those circumstances, collection of the poll tax is almost impossible. It is impossible to collect the tax in an urban area where there are students, holidaymakers, temporary workers and people who move into temporary housing having been homeless and then going on to more secure accommodation, or who move into private residential accommodation but cannot pay the tax.

Only a couple of people have written to me saying that, despite trying to do so, they cannot pay their poll tax. However, an enormous number of people consider that the first thing they should do when they move house is to let the local authority know their address so that they can get a bill. That is not something that people are instinctively most happy to do. It is unfair to treat local authorities in the same way, no matter what their circumstances are, and to assume that, whatever the local authority, a collection rate of 90 or 95 per cent. will be achieved. The problem is increased if there are linguistic problems such as those in my area where there are many first languages.

People should be in no doubt that the system, and certainly the charge capping system, is the fault of the Government. However—I say this without reservation—matters are often made worse by incompetence in the budgetary planning of local authorities. I shall do what I might be predicted to do, and that is to point out that, in

[Mr. Hughes]

Southwark, despite my great sympathy for the services that many good officers are trying to deliver, we have had a series of bungles. I shall refer to an example that all hon. Members would be troubled by, and show how money is still appallingly wasted even though we are in incredibly reduced circumstances.

According to Southwark council's finance department, we have an income of about £85 million from rents, and we have rent arrears of about £40 million. Nearly half of this year's rent income is the amount of arrears accumulated from this year and past years. No council can justify a system that does not collect the equivalent of nearly half its annual rent income by way of rents. We have a huge housing stock—the largest in London—but that does not excuse us not getting in the money. There are people in the poverty trap, but quite a lot of that money is either not chased through the housing benefit system or is not chased when people are able to pay.

Half of this week's *Southwark Sparrow*, a newspaper which is produced every week, contains advertisements for jobs in Southwark council. I make a protest under the local government legislation. The Committee, of which I was a member, suggested that advertisements should be non-political. That suggestion does not appear to be well followed, because I noticed a procession of Labour members—it is a Labour-controlled council—appearing in photographic form. Opposition members appear either not often or not at all.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): They are not as photogenic as Labour Members.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Lady thought that photogenic Labour colleagues would be shown, she would be disappointed. It is not just the quality of the subject matter; it has something to do with the editorial balance of the paper.

In the latest edition of *Southwark Sparrow* we are told by the chairman of Southwark housing that there are likely to be council rent rises of about £4 in the coming year because of "special repairs". Those repairs are meant to be done under the tenancy agreement. In future, if tenancy agreements are changed, such repairs will not be done, even though tenants are entitled to them under the housing law. They will have to pay £4 extra to get into the position that they should have been in had the job been done in the first place.

I am going to a meeting tonight—I guess that hundreds of people will be there—*[Interruption.]* I shall not be late. It is not until 8 pm. At that meeting I shall explain why the central heating and hot water systems on the Heygate estate are not working. One answer may be that they have never been maintained properly.

I have never agreed with the abolition of ILEA, and I was sympathetic with Southwark when it took over education. Continuing to pay about £100,000 to teachers who did not exist was a bit of an extravagance. With the best will in the world, the payroll department has been failing to pay some teachers, paying some teachers too much, and paying some teachers their salary but without their London weighting. It hardly leads to a contented work force if the function of the department in terms of delivering a service and paying staff is not working properly.

The bad example is in social services. We have a crisis in Southwark. I do not attribute the inherent crisis to the Labour party. Today we have 100 unallocated child risk registered children without social workers. One thousand people had their home helps taken away as a result of cuts imposed by capping only a few weeks ago. Six day centres will close, not to mention others that already have closed. All those matters are the direct result of impositions on this year's budget, caused by the Government capping Southwark, and they are objectionable for that reason.

That does not excuse, for example, deciding that the only way of dealing with the Oakhaven holiday home for the elderly and disabled in Bexhill was to close and sell it rather than using some imaginative partnership scheme with private money to keep it going. That does not excuse closing the sheltered workshop in Tooley street, rather than looking for a way of developing the site to keep it going. The hon. Members for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) joined me in an all-party alliance to make our point to the council only this week.

It also does not excuse suddenly, without any consultation with the users or their families let alone with the staff, announcing that all the 27 sheltered housing units will have no resident wardens as from next month. Therefore, vulnerable people will be able only to ring a bell at the weekend or at night. Some of them are in their 80s and 90s, some of them are in wheelchairs, and some of them have walking frames. Some of them are terrified and have written letters threatening suicide.

Such financial management, even under pressure, is inexcusable. I understand, therefore, why a Government should say, "Put your house in order; only then will we help you."

The worst example is that Southwark, a charge-capped Labour borough, which is desperately short of money and which cut 1,000 people's home helps, announced that the deputy chief executive's salary would go up to £70,000, which is more than the Prime Minister's salary. However good the deputy chief executive might be at his job, I do not think that suddenly increasing his salary by between £25,000 and £30,000 is acceptable. I certainly do not think that it is acceptable when it appeared to be the decision of what is called the urgency sub-committee, which is two people meeting in a hole in the corner. To be fair, even the Labour group was somewhat unhappy at being told that the deputy chief executive had had a salary increase that was approved by the leader of the council and one of her colleagues.

If we are serious about pleading for the needs of an inner-city authority, as we should be, we must be serious about making sure that we do not make stupid decisions. Credible local government meeting the desperate needs of inner-city people—we need millions of pounds for housing, social services and all other local government services, and we need all the money that we are meant to have—is not enhanced or helped by the local authority regularly scoring own goals and wasting millions of pounds that are not its to waste.

I shall vote for the new clause. When the Government impose charge caps, we should know what the direct implication is. I sincerely hope that the Government realise that this exercise, which was meant to bring about accountability, has not done so because it was fundamentally never likely to do it. It was meant to bring

about efficiency, but it has not done that either. It has brought hardship but not efficiency. Until we have a new system, we will not get either right.

Mr. Holt: Middlesbrough borough council is well known for its Labour bosses, who never have an original idea among them. They look slavishly around to see what is happening elsewhere and try to follow suit whenever possible. They hit on the Lambeth position. When they were examining their budgets, ostensibly to achieve the figures laid down by the Government, they cynically and deliberately failed to balance them so that they could make a special, Lambeth-type plea. The Bill is intended to stop that, and that is why I support it.

We shall tell local authorities such as Middlesbrough not to flout the law of the land but to make the necessary cuts. The cuts can easily be made. If the Labour party finds it difficult, it can hand over control to the Conservatives and we shall show them how to do it without any reduction in services. We shall give the people of Middlesbrough value for money.

As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, the inefficiency of Middlesbrough borough council was well highlighted by its failure to apply in time and correctly for concessionary television licences for elderly residents in my constituency. As a consequence, those elderly residents have lost their concessionary television licence for ever because there was a vesting date by which the applications had to be put in correctly. The clerical staff and the managers who were supposed to supervise them simply failed to apply in time.

If my hon. Friend the Minister is approached by Middlesbrough borough council asking him to waive the capping rules he should not do so, because the authority wastes money as if there were no tomorrow.

5.30 pm

Miss Lestor: My constituency of Eccles is in the city of Salford, a predominantly Labour council for many years, operating in an atmosphere of long-term unemployment and a great deal of social deprivation. No Secretary of State has yet called us inefficient or accused us of overspending. Yet in that atmosphere in my local authority, two or three matters must be brought home to the Secretary of State and those who oppose the new clause.

The cost of collecting and administering the poll tax and the non-domestic rate in Salford is £3·5 million, compared with £1·5 million in 1988-89 for the collection of the general rate. That represents £12 on every poll tax bill, assuming that everyone in the area is paying the full poll tax. Although our record of collection is good in Salford, many people are not paying the full poll tax for a variety of reasons.

Of that £3·5 million, £3 million is for collection. The treasury department has taken on an extra 75 people to administer the collection of the poll tax. The number of staff has increased from 52 to 127. The housing benefit department has taken on another 33 people to administer housing benefit properly. Of course, all those people have to be paid. That is all part of the cost of administering the poll tax.

When the Government talk about extending democracy to local government it would make me laugh if it were not so tragic. In Salford, as in many other areas, we must avoid being capped because that would be disastrous. We must increase the poll tax, not to keep or provide extra services but to pay for the administration of the poll tax. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) does not know what she is talking about when she speaks about services. She ran away almost as soon as she had finished speaking. We have had to employ extra people to administer the poll tax and also pay for computers and other equipment that we would not have needed otherwise.

In other words, to avoid being poll tax capped and to pay the extra costs of administration we have to increase the poll tax but cut services. If we increased the poll tax and increased services, we would be in danger of being capped. That is a monstrous position for any local authority, yet that is precisely our position and that of many local authorities throughout Britain.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West asked what local authorities would have done with the extra revenue if they had not been poll tax-capped. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned some omissions in local authority services in his constituency. Councils cannot provide certain services.

The Government entirely ignore the social consequences of the poll tax. Many people in my constituency have to make a choice between buying their children shoes or paying their poll tax. Hundreds of people's poll tax bills are much bigger than their bill for the general rates. No one has ever taken into account how such people are supposed to balance their budgets.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West and others often talk about cuts and wasteful authorities. The House constantly, in many instances rightly, passes legislation that imposes a charge on local authorities. Last year, I sat on the Standing Committee that considered the Children Bill. The Children Act 1990 is going out to local authorities with certain guidelines. It is estimated that administering that Act alone, which is intended to protect our children, will cost local authorities on average about £500,000 a year. How are local authorities to do it? How are they to employ the extra staff needed if they are in danger of being poll tax capped?

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey gave other examples. It is not only in London or Southwark that hundreds of children on the at-risk register have no social worker attached to them. That happens throughout the country. Inner-city social services are bursting at the seams because they have improved their techniques for identifying children at risk and detecting child abuse but cannot allocate people to protect such children.

We pass legislation and say to local authorities, "Here you are. Get on with it." We all support legislation such as the Children Act 1990, but there is no money to implement it.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Lady and I agree that one thing that we should do is state at the beginning of every Bill that comes to the House the cost and manpower implications not to only the national Treasury but to local authorities to implement what we instruct them to do. If we did that and guaranteed funding for local authorities every time we gave them a new job, we should have a fairer and more just system.

Miss Lestor: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that I intended to make and I shall conclude on that note. Conservative Members do not calculate and take no

[Miss Lestor]

interest in the cost implications for local authorities of the legislation that they pass. The Children Act 1990 cannot be properly implemented unless capping of local authorities is stopped and more resources are made available.

In my area and throughout the country services will be cut, poll tax bills will increase and there will be no improvement in services to local people who will pay higher bills to meet the administrative costs. That is what is wrong with the poll tax and with the argument that it increases democracy. From the start, poll tax bills and their consequences have been controlled by central Government, who seek to make local authorities pay the price in terms of electoral representation.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I shall not detain the House too long, but we should put the record straight. The debate has shown that Conservative Members oppose local government, whereas the Opposition have confidence in local government and want to see it provide the services that people demand and expect. New clause 1 asks that the Secretary of State

"lay before Parliament an estimate of the losses likely to be incurred to the collection fund of any authority referred to in such an order"

where poll tax capping would take place.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) criticised local government extensively. She was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill in detail, yet she did not speak one word during its proceedings. She had many opportunities to make her comments in Committee because we had a similar debate to this one. It is a pity that she did not, because that would have allowed us to debate the issue. However, she declined to take that opportunity. Even tonight, she left the Chamber to prevent us from putting the matter straight. She did not address some of the problems that face local government.

The hon. Lady did not mention the reductions in the rate support grant that have been imposed in the 11 years of this Government and which have severely restricted the ability of local authorities to provide services. She read from a publication that said that there would be no cuts in services, but she did not address that report to rate-capped authorities. She did not mention that some local authorities are likely to be in deficit at the end of this year because some of the changes that have been made were implemented halfway through the local authority financial year.

The hon. Lady acted unfairly by leaving the Chamber, as that did not allow us to explain some of the problems faced by local authorities. The hon. Lady said that the purpose of the poll tax was to equalise services throughout local authorities. She omitted to say, however, that the formula used by the Government and the Secretary of State to decide that level of services is more than 10 years old. In that time, tremendous changes have affected local government and its services. The present system allows the Secretary of State to attempt to equalise services on the basis of a 10-year-old formula. That is what is wrong with local government. It is being judged on an outdated formula. It is time that the Government updated it to achieve fairness and justice for local government.

The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) criticised Middlesbrough authority. It is fair to point out, however, that it is the electorate of that area who vote for the constitution of that authority. Under our democratic system, such votes demonstrate that the people are satisfied with their representatives and the decisions they have reached. That is the democratic system for which we fight and in which we believe. Therefore, we should take note of the decisions of the local electorate.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman's assertion that the system by which we elect an authority is democratic is not right. There is some dispute about that, and many people—including many in his party—believe that, because of the nature of the electoral system, people end up with an unrepresentative group.

Mr. O'Brien: I shall not go down that avenue, although I could take the hon. Gentleman to task over some of the principles of the voting procedure in which the Liberal Democrats profess to believe.

I want to explain the aims of the new clause. It requires the Secretary of State to inform local authorities about the effects of setting the substitute poll tax using the formula in the Bill. He should explain that that substitute will affect the following year's poll tax. I hope that hon. Members take note of the purpose of the amendment.

Mr. Holt: In the past 10 years, the population of Middlesbrough has fallen dramatically, but the formula has remained unchanged. I believe that that is right, because if the payments were not based on the old formula, Middlesbrough authority would not receive as much money as it does and the need to cap it would be even greater.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman illustrates the misleading view of the formula held by Conservative Members. Even if there was a reduction in population, highways would need to be maintained and services provided. The equalisation of services should be provided for in the formula. The Tories have got it all wrong regarding the formula needed for local government to work efficiently. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the Labour party would not introduce capping, but would have a fairer system of assessing the need for the equalisation of services throughout the country. That is Labour party policy on local government.

If Conservative Members consider the principles behind the new clause and if they have any thought for local government and the services they provide, they must give it their blessing. We shall divide the House on the new clause, and I appeal to Conservative Members in particular to support it.

5.45 pm

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities apologises to the House for his absence, but he has been called away to an important meeting. However, he will be back in time for Third Reading.

By tabling the new clause, the Opposition, once again, set out to perpetuate the myth that the Bill will in some way cause authorities to incur a deficit on the collection fund. The Opposition repeat that assertion now, despite our lengthy discussions in Committee about it. They believe that the formula in the Bill radically changes the position of the charging authorities concerned by

preventing them from increasing the allowance they made for non-collection when they first set their charges for the year. That is simply not the case. It is also not true that the Bill would require capped authorities to make further budget cuts to allow for non-collection in addition to those required by capping.

As I made clear in Committee, the Opposition's arguments are based on a false premise. There is a statutory requirement for an authority to balance its books when setting the charges at the start of the year. The Bill does not change that. All authorities must make their best estimate of income and expenditure at the beginning of the year and live with the consequences. An authority's actual income and expenditure are bound to differ somewhat from its estimate, so, at the end of the year, its collection fund will be in surplus or deficit. If the actual number of charge payers is lower than the authority estimated when setting its charge, the actual income will be less than estimated and a deficit will ensue.

No authority can increase its charges part way through the year just because it realises that it got its estimates wrong. The statutory arrangements are such that any deficit must be allowed for when setting next year's charges. All authorities are in the same boat. The Bill simply guarantees that capped authorities are firmly kept in that boat.

Mr. Illsley *rose*——

Mr. Key: I would rather make progress than give way; that will enable me to answer the points made by the hon. Gentleman and others.

The Opposition persist in believing that a capped authority is, in some way, disadvantaged by the fact that the formula deliberately prevents it from changing its non-collection allowance. I firmly reject that. The whole point behind the formula is to ensure that charge payers in such authorities are not disadvantaged by a repetition of the antics in which Lambeth indulged this year.

It is a pleasure to be back with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). He referred to his long-suffering friend, Offa. I, too, have a long-suffering friend called Tigger. I suggest that Offa should come to dinner with Tigger. While they are eating, we could discuss, without any preconditions, the possible reforms that the hon. Gentleman might like to make to the community charge.

The hon. Gentleman said that Lambeth would not send out its bill by 1 April because of the Secretary of State's decision to cap the authority. However, the hon. Gentleman misunderstands the capping process. The statutory position is clear—each charging authority must set its charge by 1 April and send out bills as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter. That process should continue irrespective of capping. Charge payers must pay the charge as originally set until, if there is capping, the revised substitute charge has been set.

As I said in Committee, when Lambeth people went to the polls in May, they knew that the council had been designated for capping because, in the Secretary of State's opinion, its budget was excessive. Lambeth knew that the Secretary of State had proposed to cut £8·8 million, or £51 per adult. Those people trooped off and voted because they believed what the Labour party said. They expected their charges to be below £500, but we all know that, in the event, that did not happen. What did it do after cutting its budget? It reduced the charge to £521·63. The Labour party cheated its electorate. That was the problem with Lambeth.

In March, when Lambeth set its original charge for the year, it used an estimate of non-collection—the number of people liable to pay who do not do so—of 10 per cent. In August, when the council reset its charge following capping, it increased its estimate to 15 per cent. The effect of the change was to deny the Lambeth charge payer about £29 of the reduction implied by the cuts in its budget.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend probably knows this from his records. I have some Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy figures showing that, in the last recorded year of rate collection, Lambeth council had £33 million of rate arrears. That amounted to almost 20 per cent. That shows how Lambeth has effectively been trying to cook its books in front of its electors.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. The Audit Commission had a great deal to say about Lambeth and about the fact that the council was sending bills to addresses outside the borough, to people who did not exist and, in some cases, to the same people four times over. I know that Opposition Members find it embarrassing to have to defend Lambeth, so I shall move on to the contributions made by other hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) made a forceful speech, in which she made it clear that capping does not necessarily lead to job cuts. She is absolutely right. She referred in particular to computer software. I can assure the House that we are conscious of the computer implications of our policy decisions. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on 17 January, in the context of the community charge reduction scheme, we have tried to have regard to local government computer software programmes and have confined the changes that we have made to those likely to have the least effect on the costs that will result.

My hon. Friend also referred to gerrymandering. I did not think that I would see the day when poor "Mr. Gerry Mander" was dragged into our debates on this little Bill. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Brightside has been to pay homage, as I have, to the tomb of Mr. Gerry—a delightful tomb in Marblehead in Boston in the United States. It is worth a visit. I do not think that we can blame Mr. Gerry Mander for anything that has happened in the House today.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) made an interesting speech in which he talked about the difficulties surrounding the standard spending assessments. A charge that is often made against us is that it is unfair that one authority should have a different SSA from another. That is particularly so when hon. Members perceive that neighbouring constituencies have more money. The whole point of the SSA system—which is well established—is that the criteria apply equally right across the country.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central mentioned non-payment. A non-collection estimate has to be made when setting a charge for the future year. In the case of Barnsley, it was 6 per cent., representing an extra £16·79 on the charge. I understand why people in Barnsley resent having to pay more merely because some people refuse to pay the charge. Non-payment denies councils funds and

[Mr. Key]

shifts the burden onto those who pay. We have given local authorities wide-ranging enforcement powers to help them to keep their charges down.

I should not omit the hon. Member for Bristol, south (Ms. Primarolo). Bristol is a fine city—a proud and ancient city—and I do not think that it will consider itself well served in this place by someone who will not pay the poll tax, who is leading a community protest and who is proud that 100,000 citizens are not paying their taxes. I hope that all the hon. Lady's constituents realise, when their bills drop through the letterbox, that they are paying for her.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made an interesting constituency speech. We welcome the contribution that the Liberal Democrats have made to our discussion of the review of local government finance and structure. We had a most constructive meeting with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and look forward to the next meeting. I only wish that we could have such a constructive dialogue with the official Opposition.

As always, my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) made a spirited speech. He made the important point that value for money also means value for people. I sometimes think that Labour authorities find that hard to understand and to stomach.

The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) has a fine local authority in the fine city of Salford. Some people say that Salford is overshadowed by Manchester. I think that anyone who knows Salford will be able to differentiate between the two cities and I therefore respect what the hon. Lady said. I shall treat her speech as a submission to our review.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) talked about local government expenditure. His remarks took my breath away. He spoke as if local authorities were impoverished institutions that were constantly having their budget slashed by a wicked Government unwilling to enable them to carry out their functions. Local authority spending has increased by 25 per cent. in just two years, yet the Opposition would have us believe that it will be necessary to increase local authority spending by 50 per cent. in three years. That is absolute nonsense. This year alone, an extra £3 billion is going into local government. I suspect that if the Opposition had their way, it could be £30 billion, £300 billion or £3,000 billion and it would still not be considered sufficient.

Mr. O'Brien: I referred to the Government's cuts in rate support grant. What is the Minister attitude to that question?

Mr. Key: I shall be delighted to answer that and so illustrate the fact that the hon. Gentleman does not understand local government finance. As he well knows, one has to consider aggregate external finance, which includes rate support grant, non-domestic rates and what the charge payer contributes. Aggregate external financing has increased year after year, with the injection of an extra £3 billion this year alone. The plain fact is that there is no reason why capped authorities should have the opportunity, not available to other authorities to look again at their non-collection estimates.

The new clause is misconceived in principle. It has no bearing on the purpose of the Bill, which is to protect charge payers by guaranteeing that the budget reductions achieved by capping feed through in full to lower charges. I call on the House to reject it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—
The House divided: Ayes 231, Noes 341.

Division No. 44] **[5·57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael

Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

Certification of Statutory Duties

'( )(1) Sections 1 to 5 below shall have effect subject to the making of an Order under section 6(1), and no such Order shall be made in respect of the first year before the fulfilment of the requirements of this section.

(2) Before making any Order in respect of the first year under section 6(1) below, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of State shall for the purposes of subsection (3) below lay before Parliament a report specifying—

(a) the principal statutory duties on each class of relevant authority as specified in section 35(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988; and

(b) the likely impact on any such statutory duties of any authority which he expects to be required to set a substitute precept or amount in accordance with section 35(1) or 35(4) of the principal Act of the restriction of information on which such a determination may be based arising as a result of this Act.

(3) The Secretary of State shall, before making any Order to which the above subsections refer, certify that in his opinion no statutory duty of any authority which he expects to be required to set a substitute amount or precept in accordance with sections 35(1) or 35(4) of the principal Act is likely to be breached as a result of the operation of this Act.

(4) Where in making any determination under subsection (3) above the Secretary of State considers that any statutory duty of an authority concerned is likely to be breached by virtue of the setting of a substitute amount or precept irrespective of the operation of this Act, he shall make reference to this matter in any report laid before Parliament under subsection (2) above.'.—*[Mr. Murphy.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 2, in clause 6, page 5, line 28, after 'applies', insert

'subject to the making of an Order in accordance with section (Certification of Statutory Duties) above'.

Mr. Murphy: The purpose of the new clause and the amendment is to focus debate on the possible impact of the Bill on authorities that may be in danger of breaching their statutory duties. The amendments propose an order-making, certification and reporting process designed to give Parliament early warning of authorities that may be forced into a breach of their statutory duties and responsibilities. Before the Bill was applied in the first year Secretaries of State would be required under subsection (3) to certify that no authority affected would be forced to breach its statutory duties as a result of the operation of this unwelcome Bill.

The Bill essentially requires authorities to set substitute amounts in response to a formula and it prevents them from taking into account the latest view of information available to them at the time when the original amount was set. The difference likely to be made in the level of poll tax which may be set may be small but it could, in a critical case, push an authority into a choice between incurring losses and breaching the duties that this House has imposed on them.

More broadly, the effect of subsections (2) and (4) together is that a report must be laid when capping orders are produced, setting out the main statutory duties of authorities and showing where breaches of such duties may occur as a result of the Act or as a result of capping generally. In other words, when the Secretary of State is made aware that a council's statutory duties and obligations cannot be carried out by an authority, he must tell Parliament. As the Secretary of State must ask Parliament's permission for a whole range of actions to do with local government finance, it would be but a small matter for him, or them—since the Secretary of State for Wales would also be involved—to lay the details before the House of Commons.

When local authorities recently took the Secretary of State for the Environment to court, the effects of poll tax capping on their statutory responsibilities and duties were not seen as clearly as they are today. There was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said in Committee, some reference to education budgets, but statutory duties were seen in a very general light. Given our experience since then, we now know that sudden changes in council's budgets imposed by Government can have the most disastrous effects on the mandatory and statutory services that they must carry out.

I should like to mention some of the statutory duties that the Government have imposed on local authorities by means of legislation. The Food Safety Act 1990 lays a general duty on food authorities to enforce legislation and to appoint public analysts. Last year, the Government

sponsored and the House approved the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which imposes a host of duties and responsibilities on our councils. Local authorities become the enforcement and licensing authorities for air pollution. They have a duty to keep public registers of all pollution licences and to create arm's-length waste disposal companies under the direction of the Secretary of State. They have a duty in respect of waste regulation authorities to licence waste management premises, and so on. Local authorities have many duties to do with waste collection, litter disposal, pollution of the air and of the soil—all of them laid on them by Parliament as a direct result of the legislation.

6.15 pm

Last year, Parliament passed the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, and even though the Government have postponed financing that Act, it will eventually mean that local authorities will have various duties in respect of community care.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) referred in the previous debate to the problem that his and other local authorities are having with education. Over the past few years, the Government have passed several education Acts. The curiously named Education Reform Act 1988 introduced the national curriculum and local management of schools. The Education Act 1986 had to do with special education. The Education Act 1981 concerned governing bodies, and the Education Act 1962 dealt with student awards. All these Acts, approved by Parliament, laid mandatory duties on local authorities which cost them considerable sums of money.

Most capped authorities will have made cuts in their education service at a time when the Government are implementing a variety of measures to improve, they say, standards in schools. During the legal action taken by capped authorities against the Secretary of State, various local authorities' officers served affidavits against the Secretary of State highlighting their worries about meeting their statutory duties. One officer said:

"the council, if called upon to make education cuts, would simply be unable to carry out its statutory functions with respect to education."

Only yesterday, the Prime Minister saw fit to refer to homelessness and to how he believed that it should be tackled. All of us who have been involved in local authority housing matters are aware that the plight of the homeless is receiving increasing attention from local authorities and the Government; yet the statutory responsibilities that the Government place on local authorities can be met only if they are matched by the necessary money. Limits on expenditure caused by capping will inevitably result in fewer resources to deal with the problem. On top of capping, the Government have exacerbated the problem of homelessness by changing the subsidy arrangements for people housed in short-lease accommodation. That means that authorities must rely on expensive bed-and-breakfast accommodation. So district councils face increasing difficulty in coping with the problem of homelessness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), with her considerable experience in these matters, mentioned earlier the Children Act 1989. That Act and other social services legislation, such as the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, mean that a reduction in social services expenditure caused by capping will affect the most vulnerable sectors of our society.

Although the main provisions of the National Health Service and Community Care Act have been postponed, authorities are having to provide services for clients released from institutional care. In addition, limitations on finance make it more difficult for authorities to respond to the requirements of the Children Act. Recent media reports on child abuse have highlighted the importance of valuable resources being devoted to such services, the responsibility for which has been placed on the shoulders of local authorities by this House.

Local authorities have no choice about carrying out these functions. It has been a common complaint against all Governments, Labour or Conservative, that they under-resource our councils when they impose new duties on them. But this is worse: even when local authorities set a poll tax to cover their legal responsibilities, the scene can, because of this Bill, be changed dramatically, and they will simply run out of money or be forced to reduce vital services which are required by law.

It is crucial for Parliament to be give such a picture at the time of the setting of the poll tax so that we know that services that we have said must be carried out cannot be carried out because of a Minister's actions. The new clause and amendments would allow Parliament to debate such a critical situation. Even our consideration this evening of the possibility of such an occurrence highlights how dangerous and mischievous this seemingly technical Bill is. The Government would be well advised to accept these changes, if only as a prelude to dropping the whole Bill altogether, for its very existence makes a mockery of the Government's self-confessed claim to want local government accountability, and it certainly flies in the face of the even more ludicrous claim that the Government genuinely want to review or even abolish the poll tax.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The whole of the Bill makes nonsense of the Government's claim to be trying to introduce greater accountability at local level, and these amendments are brought to bear at a point where local government is being made answerable to Parliament, which is a negation of the entire concept of local government. I understand why they have been introduced in their present form: the Government are trying to widen the accountability so that it is not just a matter of the level of poll tax but also refers to the kind of services to be provided. I understand the argument that is being put.

It would, however, also be appropriate in making any such statement to refer to the extent to which the difficulties in providing services had been exacerbated by non-payment of the tax. First, it would be relevant for people to know at that point how much the authority's ability to provide services had been impaired by campaigns to persuade people not to pay the tax at all.

It is an increasing source of considerable resentment that there are still campaigns, supported in some cases by Labour Members, to encourage people who can afford to pay not to do so. It would therefore be interesting to see —although in practice one could not have this sort of detail—how much of the non-payment related to people who were liable for the full rate of tax, people who were entitled to no rebate and who might have considerably

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

higher incomes, and how much of it related to that section of the population which have been forced to pay 20 per cent. of the tax even though it had very little or no income.

We are talking about two rather different categories of people: those who could pay but refuse to do so and those who are in genuine and serious difficulty. It would be appropriate for us to know, in considering whether the statutory services could be paid for, if an authority had collected much less of the tax than other authorities. The non-payment element should be considered at this point.

Secondly, the tax is very difficult to collect in practice. It is particularly difficult to collect in urban areas where there is great mobility of population and from those people who just do not have the money to pay it. That is not a particular partisan observation—it was made by the Audit Commission in a recently published report on the tax. It led the commission to point to the futility of trying to collect the compulsory 20 per cent. from people who simply did not have the money to pay it.

It is an absurdity in the whole social security-benefit-taxing system that, because of the political requirement that everyone should pay a significant part of the tax, we seek to exact from people money that we know they cannot afford. We know it because we have a social security system which assesses that they cannot, yet we still insist on trying to get that 20 per cent. out of them. In some cases they will be the people who are the targets of the very statutory services threatened by the authority's inability to find enough money.

Those are two reasons why the statement should be much wider than proposed in the amendment and should refer to the non-payment element, both the deliberate and wilful element and that which arises from the absurdity of the tax. It is one of the many reasons why I believe that the tax should be scrapped and replaced by something that can reasonably be collected because it is both fair and effectively run. I refer to a local income tax.

This part of the Bill is being regarded with concern, not just by authorities which have already been capped but by those threatened with capping. Earlier today I met city councillors and officers from Newcastle upon Tyne who are watching their budget very anxiously because of the possibility of capping. The people whom I saw were from the social services committee; they were worried about providing one of the statutory services referred to in the amendment. There is a threat to the very important basic services that they provide.

One, in particular, is of concern to me because it affects my constituency. The authority is having to consider closing the County hotel in Rothbury, which for a long time has provided respite care for hundreds of elderly people and their carers in Newcastle upon Tyne. In large part it is self-financing, but there is a significant element of subsidy, essential because of the character of the care provided and the low incomes of the families to whom it is provided. The accommodation service, which provides employment in my constituency, has brought into the village of Rothbury for many years elderly people from the Tyneside conurbation who clearly benefit from this break in their normal routine, and there is an even greater benefit to the carers who would normally look after them. The service is a potential victim of capping, along with other important services in the city.

Newcastle spends more on its social services than do many other authorities, including my county of Northumberland, and questions must be asked about the costing and management of services in many of the authorities where the levels of charge are so high. It is difficult to ask those questions—and it is particularly difficult for the general public to ask them—when the system of Government grant to local authorities is as confused and confusing as it now is. It is another illustration that no one really knows who is responsible.

The Government have managed to bring about a situation in which the general public are confused about whether their authority is a high spender or whether it is the Government's fault because the grant system is all wrong. On the whole, they are inclined to blame the Government, so the Government must get themselves out of the situation by carrying out the sort of fundamental reform about which the Secretary of State is beginning to talk about. I am glad to hear that he is beginning to talk about it, but it still seems a long way away and, unless he pulls a rabbit from a hat, people will carry on blaming the Government and being confused and puzzled by it all.

My area, Castle Morpeth, has a poll tax which is £100 higher than that of neighbouring authorities. People ask why our authority is not going to be capped. There are two reasons. One is that the borough council spends too little to qualify for capping. The other is that 80 per cent. of the money goes to Northumberland county council. The reason for the £100 difference, however, lies deep in the interstices of the Government grant system and the safety net system. It all relates to the complicated arrangements by which the Government assessed average rateable values; it has absolutely nothing to do with the relative spending levels of the Castle Morpeth authority compared with other authorities. Its spending levels are broadly similar to those of its neighbours.

The public, however, has no way of understanding these complexities; they are difficult enough for professionals to make sense of, and they further show that the whole debate about capping takes place in an atmosphere and against a background where no one knows or can say with authority who is to blame—certainly no one whom the public is likely to believe. People listen to assertions and counter-assertions from those who have an axe to grind.

It is depressing that all Conservative Members seem fervently to believe that all Conservative authorities are terribly responsible and that only Labour authorities overspend. A contrary view appears to obtain on the Opposition side. The general public are not much inclined to believe that sort of thing, and it further underlines the case for fundamental reform. Even if the statement envisaged in the new clause is produced and the House had the benefit of the Government's statement along with the capping statement of how statutory services would be affected, I do not think that people would believe that either. The sooner we get rid of this nonsense the better.

6.30 pm

Mr. Key: The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) spoke about the statutory duties that the House places on local authorities and listed a long catalogue of woes. Under our intended criteria, no authority would be capped if its budget were at or below its standard spending assessment. Those assessments take account of the new

burdens and duties on authorities, and also take account of scope for greater efficiency and the amount that the country can afford.

The hon. Member for Torfaen spoke about affidavits submitted by certain local authority officers. It is important to get the matter straight. In their judgment their Lordships said:

"Capping does not in any way impinge on the rights of members of the authority either as citizens or as councillors, nor does it impugn their collective conduct as either unlawful or discreditable. A difference of opinion between the Secretary of State and the designated authority as to what is the appropriate level at which their community charge and their expenditure should be set is purely a political difference."

It is important to place that on record.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is not puzzled or confused, as became clear when he came to talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and me. We were grateful to him for coming and for his constructive approach. We welcome his participation. Plainly, we must have a fundamental review of local government. Perhaps it should have been done many years ago. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is taking these matters forward and I am glad that it is being done with the participation of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

The new clause and the related amendment seek to delay the operation of the Bill's provisions for any particular year and to place a series of requirements on the Secretary of State. They say that he must make an order and before doing so he must lay a report before Parliament. Before doing that, he must make or issue a certificate in some unspecified way.

That bizarre and convoluted procedure suggested by the Opposition appears to have as its rationale—such a description is charitable to say the least—the idea that in some way the Bill affects the fulfilment by a capped authority of its statutory duties. Plainly, the Bill affects the duty of a charging authority to reset its charges after capping. That is the whole point. It is to guarantee that charge payers are not denied the full benefits of capping. The behaviour of Lambeth council this year shows that such protection is needed.

Leaving aside that self-evident point and the complete confusion over the proposed changes between precepting and charging authorities, I have to tell the House that the suggestion that the Bill otherwise affects the capped authorities' fulfilment of their statutory duties is completely unfounded and misconceived. It has no bearing on the matter. The provision of services by capped authorities is not affected by the Bill, which is about the translation of budget cuts, following capping, into commensurate reductions in charges. The Bill is not about capping in general or about the size or implications of budget cuts resulting from the capping of excessive and overblown budgets. Legislation on that is contained in part VII of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister accept that, essentially, it is the capping of a budget that is derived from the 1988 Act and that ultimately the budget is related to services? Surely if the revenue that can be raised by the community charge or poll tax is limited by an Act of Parliament, that is bound to have an effect upon the statutory duties placed on local authorities.

Mr. Key: My argument all along and in Committee is that that is not the case. The amount of money in the collection fund is but one factor that an authority will have to consider when setting its budget for the following year. That shows one of the fundamental errors in many of the Opposition's amendments. In terms of the effect of budget reductions required by capping, any cap set would represent the Secretary of State's view of what is reasonable, achievable and appropriate in all the circumstances of each capped authority. There are procedures by which authorities can make representations about proposed caps, and they are fully taken into account by the Secretary of State when he makes his decisions about final capping levels. The first year of capping in which the proposed caps of three authorities were increased shows that those procedures are no mere charade.

No authority can be free of the need for expenditure restraint and for seeking greater value for money which, as I said earlier, in the end means greater value for people. For next year we have made known for the information of authorities our firm intentions for capping criteria. At their express request we did that much earlier than in the past. I do not accept any suggestion that capping necessarily leads to disruption of essential services. There is considerable scope for authorities to look carefully at the administration and management of their services to ensure that waste is eliminated and efficiency improved. I suspect that many Opposition Members would be the first to appreciate and recognise that and that many of their authorities would try to achieve it. The new clause is not merely misconceived but completely irrelevant to the Bill's purpose. I urge the House to reject it.

Mr. Murphy: The purpose of the new clause is that it is only when a local authority's statutory duties and responsibilities are affected adversely by the operation of the Act that a report has to be made to the House. If, as the Minister suggests, the local authority is not affected by the poll tax cap, no report would be made to the House. Therefore, the Government have nothing to lose by accepting the new clause.

Question put and negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.37 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I apologise to the House for my absence during part of our earlier proceedings, but I gather that in my absence hon. Members continued to debate the Bill with all the good humour that characterised our proceedings in Committee. I pay tribute to the Opposition and to my colleagues for the very good spirit in which our debates were conducted.

I suspect that the House would like me to be brief because this is a short Bill. It has been exhaustively debated and at this stage it would be challenging to make a long speech about it. I remind the House that the Bill's intentions are limited. As the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), said, the Bill is not about capping in general. However, on several occasions it has given us the opportunity to confirm that the Government stand ready to use their capping powers in the coming year in line with

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 31 October when he was Secretary of State for the Environment and which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment confirmed in his statement to the House on 17 January.

The Bill seeks to close a loophole which could have had serious consequences, and which in any case represented an injustice because it would have allowed local authorities to avoid passing on to community charge payers the benefit that was intended for them by the act of capping. I was considerably surprised to find that the Labour party did not wish to support us at least on the narrow point that, once an authority had been capped and had gone to the length of setting its new budget and making the necessary reductions in spending, the benefit should be made available to community charge payers.

Mr. Illsley: Again the hon. Gentleman has referred to the idea of the benefit of charge capping being passed on. There are certainly no benefits in my authority from charge capping. It has affected jobs, the music centre, has brought about redundancies and so on.

Mr. Portillo: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. If he looks at the reduced community charge bills which people have to pay, he will find I think that the largest reduction in any one authority was £99—and I speak from memory—in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. If the hon. Gentleman speaks to my hon. Friend who represents that borough, he will find that my hon. Friend will speak eloquently about the difference that £99 makes to a community charge payer in Fulham. It makes a very big difference indeed. The hon. Gentleman should not simply be concerned with levels of spending which in themselves tell us nothing about levels of service. He must also be concerned about levels of cost and what people can afford. Local authorities should take that into account, but the Government stand ready to help them to take it into account by means of capping but must, after the operation of this Bill, put it into effect by benefiting charge payers.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister aware that when capping was announced there was considerable public debate? There was even more public debate when it was found that, as a consequence of charge capping, children in my authority cannot now go swimming from school. Schools have stopped all swimming. Furthermore, children cannot learn music at a centre of excellence which had to be closed and teachers made redundant.

Those are the so-called benefits from charge capping. The charge payers in my area had their bills reduced by £59. If the level of public debate, in the local press and in the media in general, including a petition delivered to 10 Downing street containing tens of thousands of signatures, was anything to go by, people would have accepted the original legislation. They would have liked to have the opportunity to retain the benefits of swimming facilities under the education system, the music centre and all the rest of it. Once again, I point out that in Barnsley there are no benefits from charge capping.

Mr. Portillo: In a way, the hon. Gentleman makes my point for me, although he does not mean to do so. I do not accept that the consequences that he describes necessarily flow from charge capping. Let us for a moment suppose that they did. All the changes in spending having been made, and also the reductions in service, would the hon. Gentleman then wish to see the reduced charges denied to the community charge payer? I know the hon. Gentleman to be a rational and reasonable person and I should have thought that he would say that, at the very least, if all that pain has been suffered, there should be some offsetting benefit, which is that people pay £59 less in community charge.

In the borough of Lambeth, the process having been gone through and reductions having been made, the borough sought to deny in full the benefit in reduced community charging. That is the limited point in this Bill. We thought that what happened in Lambeth was unacceptable.

We also thought that there was another important point of principle: that all boroughs, whether capped or not, should be put on all fours with each other. No other council, once it has set its charge for the year, can go back in mid year and alter its estimate of the number of people who will be paying community charge. No other council will have the luxury of going back in mid year and changing its idea about what the community charge should be. We do not believe that, just because an authority has been capped, it should be put in a different position. We thought that what happened in the Lambeth case was quite wrong and thought it essential to put the position right. We are determined that there should be no repetition of that.

We have been surprised that the Labour party, on this narrow point, has still sought to affirm the right of local authorities, having made the necessary reductions, still to deny to their community charge payers the benefit of those reductions. We are determined that that should not be repeated. That is why I commend this short Bill to the House, and urge that it should go to another place.

6.45 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I am sorry that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), is departing as I was about to ask him to have a word with the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) about his earlier remarks—not least the inappropriateness of his words about dyslexia, never mind his astonishing remarks, in view of the circumstances, about breweries. Perhaps hon. Members on the Treasury Bench will pass those thoughts on to the Secretary of State.

We have already stated in Committee and this evening that this Bill was ill-timed and is an irrelevence. We believed that it was ill-conceived when it was first brought forward, but circumstances have overtaken it. It is now superfluous as well as an inconvenience and an irrelevance. Therefore, we shall be voting against it.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities suggests that it is a surprise to him that the Labour party is against this Bill as it is merely a tidying-up exercise, consequent on ill drafting—he did not say that, but it clearly is such an exercise. It is a consequence of the ill drafting that flowed from the 1988 Act. That is astonishing, given that we trawled through the legislation for three months often late into the night and the early hours of the morning. I remember it well. It resulted in my ending up in hospital with pneumonia, which was a great relief after sitting through that Bill. Nevertheless, here we are with a sort of afterthought—a little pimple on the

original Bill. But the pimple is a bit more than that. It is more like a boil. That is why we have chosen to lance it if we can. We think that that would be in the best interests of the overall health of the patient. In this case the patient is what remains of local democracy.

The poll tax capping legislation and the way in which it has been imposed allow the Government to set the figure for spending. Of course, the Government assumed that there was a simple equation between the setting of the figure for spending and the subsequent poll tax. This Bill reflects the belief that there is a simple equation to be imposed which, inevitably, will result in a particular poundage. We do not accept that. We believe that the information on which the Government need to work should take fully into account the local circumstances about which the officials and councillors at local level are in the best position to make a judgment. The Government are not in such a position. Those changed circumstances arise directly from the consequences of capping.

When an authority is capped, there is an inevitable delay in the imposition of the poll tax at local level. There is a change in the likely collection level, as there is in terms of the equated and relevant population levels. Therefore, there is a danger that the collection of the poll tax will result in a shortfall to the collection fund. If that happens, there will be consequences which, apart from protecting the poll tax payer, will have an adverse result.

The Minister in charge of the Bill and Committee members constantly referred to hapless poll tax payers. We thought it an appropriate phrase. In fact, the hapless poll tax payer would not get the benefits that he believes this Bill will bring to him. Poll tax capping has a detrimental effect on services and the provision of services is what local authorities are all about, rather than low taxation. They are about value for money and the relationship between the tax raised and the level of services provided.

The whole intention of a local authority is not to levy no tax and provide no services. I know that new recruits today on the Conservative Benches believe that. The new recruits are people like the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) who has just joined the Minister of State in the No Turning Back group. She said this afternoon that she believed in compulsory tendering rather than compulsory competitive tendering, which was in the document recently published by the No Turning Back group. It must come as a revelation to the Minister to have recruits to the group, just at the moment when we all believed that it was about to be disbanded. That is life after death indeed. It suggests that there may be movements and murmurings, which we suspected existed, to show that the lady who departed No. 10 just a few weeks before Christmas lies in the shadows after all, waiting, watching and encouraging. That is a sign that things are on the move.

Of course, what is not on the move is the poll tax—*[Interruption.]* I must correct myself. The poll tax is on the move—it is in reverse gear and going backwards, and tonight poll tax capping and the Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill are going with it. Why did the Government continue with the Bill? Even if it was relevant before last week, it is certainly not relevant now.

As I said earlier, if the Government introduce so-called relief in the form of a new community charge relief scheme, and if that brings into equilibrium the present year's bills —with the promise of a £104 maximum payment compared with the old rates—the logic is that capping will be abandoned to allow people to make a clear judgment between different local authorities, and between different parties within local authorities, as from this year to next. That is the logic, so capping becomes an irrelevance unless any vestige of accountability has been abandoned and the Government do not want a clearer indication between different parties and different local authorities upon which the electorate can make a judgment. Capping would interfere with that judgment.

Not only does the Secretary of State now have the ability to fix the relationship between the current bills and the previous rate bills, which we shall be debating next week, but under capping he has the ability to determine next year's bills, and therefore their relationship with this year's bills. That takes away any vestige of decision-making by a local authority and any judgment by the local electorate about the responsibility of those elected local councillors for their decisions. It is a mess.

It is important to spell out exactly what the Government's responsibilities are, so that if people are worried about the cuts in services and the dangers to their education, social services, leisure and protection services, they will understand that it is the Government who are at fault. The Government have the power to determine the exact level of poll tax being levied—and, under the Bill, can determine the exact poundage—so the electorate should be aware that it is the Government who are at fault. If people do not like the unholy mess of the Government setting the poll tax and determining the cuts, the Government are at fault again. Whether it is cuts in services, poll tax levels, administrative chaos, or an unholy mess at local level, only one set of people is to blame—Conservative Ministers. They have brought it upon themselves because they have bound, gagged and generally put aside any vestiges of local democracy.

There is universal capping, universal suffering and universal centralisation. Ministers are responsible for the whole mess. That is the logic and the outturn of the Bill. However, we have revealed some grave misunderstandings among Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West did not even understand the difference between equalisation and standard spending assessments. She revealed that she is now wholly committed to the SSAs, which only a few weeks ago she declared herself to be against.

The formula has not changed and the implementation has not changed—only minds have changed. Of course, everybody is open to persuasion, arm twisting and pressure, but the SSAs have not altered and nor has the amount put into revenue support. All that has altered is a commitment from Conservative Back Benchers, on a wing and a prayer, in the hope that the new Secretary of State will bring them some promise and relief to get them through the general election. The Bill shows that there is no hope of that.

Whatever happens, there will be capping. Whatever happens, there will be greater centralisation. With that greater centralisation will come more determination of the services provided at local level. In other words, we will continue to get what we have now, but with a slight change of formula. Perhaps there will be a property tax together with the poll tax. Perhaps there will be centralised delivery of major services together with the poll tax. Perhaps there will be a property tax, greater centralisation and the poll tax. We could end up with all three. Whatever happens,

[Mr. Blunkett]

there will be the same mess as we are in tonight because the same ideology and values will be imposed upon the same people.

The electorate will not be fooled by what is happening today or by what we debate next Tuesday. That is why we are asking that the Bill be set aside. It has wasted a great deal of time. We have endeavoured to get the Minister to go back to the Department to fight his corner for poll tax as best he can. We have tried to concentrate on the key issues rather than becoming bogged down in the algebraic formulae. We hope that from today's debate and from our debates in Committee people will have learnt a little more about local government and about the importance of allowing decisions to be taken at local level.

Hon. Members might not be aware that in advocating that the Secretary of State should have the right, under the Bill, to determine the exact contribution from the poll tax payer to the collection fund, they have missed a provision that already exists in the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Section 99(4) of that Act already gives the Secretary of State the power to do what one Conservative Member proclaimed should have been necessary in authorities which managed, through creativity or by drawing on reserves, to avoid capping. That section allows the Secretary of State to demand adjustments in the amount placed in the collection fund if he believes that that fund exceeds the figure necessary to provide the agreed services voted through a council. Of course, that would apply whether or not that council was capped because it would be the same formula.

However, that has not been included in the Bill. The only reason for that, and the only reason for the Bill, is simply that the Government lost their court case against Lambeth. It is a piece of spite. The Government simply could not be defeated by Lambeth, of all boroughs. They could not face the fact that the High Court had proclaimed that, on this occasion, Lambeth had it right. After all that had happened over the years with court cases and with obiter dicta, when judges said that they sympathised with local government and understood why it had taken certain actions, but that nevertheless the Secretary of State had the drafting right in legislation and all power rested in Marsham street, suddenly all power did not rest there. The last tiny vestige of power to determine the poll tax level and to ensure that the collection fund was adequate to meet a given level of services was taken out of the hands of the Secretary of State. Lambeth won. As a consequence, we have wasted our time on this Bill. That is what it is all about.

The Government had the power under section 99(4) and through recent decisions to fix next year's bills through universal capping, and to compare next year's bills through the new charge relief scheme. All those things exist and all the powers are there; but Lambeth had won. We believe that capping is unnecessary; we believe that poll tax is unworkable and we think that the Government should come clean and admit defeat. They should withdraw the Bill, withdraw the poll tax and adopt our alternative. Let us go back to a common-sense scheme which will give cheaper bills, more equality and equity and greater fairness. Let us have a modern property tax, adjusted according to the ability to pay, to provide decent services for the people who vote for local authorities.

7 pm

Mr. Beith: Why have we been asked to give a Third Reading to this Bill? The Bill is before us because the courts found that there was a small gap in the Government's ability to dictate what should be the level of poll tax paid in certain local authorities. The gap was that the local authority could still charge a higher poll tax than its reduced expenditure, as a result of capping, would allow. Why is it necessary for us to give a Third Reading to the Bill in order to fill that gap? The Government have pointed out how ludicrous it would be for a local authority, having been forced to cut its services drastically by capping, not then to reduce the poll tax paid by its poll tax payers. They would be suffering a double pain and the Minister has pointed out that this would be an extraordinary consequence—so extraordinary that it would seem sufficient to remind the people of that state of affairs and invite them to the react accordingly when next given the opportunity to elect their local authority. It might well lead them to throw out the people who were in charge and replace them with others. Indeed, the whole capping mechanism seems to beg the question why the behaviour of local authorities, which the Government criticise so strongly, is not so repugnant that they get thrown out by the electorate which put them there in the first place.

There are a number of reasons why the Government have felt obliged to press ahead with this Bill rather than relying on the good sense of the local electorate. One reason is that the local electorate does not have the means to exercise its good sense because the electoral system distorts the choice that it can make. The Government know that. They are reluctant to change it because of the wider implications. It might increase the pressure for electoral reform at national level. The Government must know that; otherwise they would be ready to abandon this Bill and rely on the local electorate to throw out a local authority that visits upon the people an excessively high poll tax, even when the services have been cut because of capping. The Government are well aware that there are fiefdoms of one-party rule which arise from not having a fair electoral system. There are local authorities in which opposition voices cannot be adequately heard.

There is a second reason why the Government have felt obliged to press ahead to the Third Reading. They brought before us and enacted a tax which, in their view, should have made this Bill unnecessary. They brought forward a tax which was supposed to be so simple and so clear that everybody would understand that if they were being asked to pay too much they would react accordingly at the polls. But the people do not understand and the system is extremely complicated because it is such a bad tax. It is a flat-rate tax which does not take proper account of the ability to pay. Therefore, it has had to be cushioned and modified in more and more ways. Last week we had details of the next way in which it has to be cushioned. That cushioning is necessary because it is such a bad tax. In our view, it needs to be abolished and replaced with a local income tax. Until we have a tax that is related to ability to pay and can be collected by a competent system—we suggest the use of the existing PAYE system—all the cushioning will continue to be necessary. Therefore, local electors will not know precisely who is responsible for their high charges and, again, that will be a justification for capping. The Government will feel that they must cap the

charges of the local authorities and the local electorate cannot know whose fault it is that their charges are so high.

Some of the charges that are the subject of capping are grotesquely high. The Lambeth poll tax level is ludicrously high. It should be self-evident that there is something wrong. The Government have only themselves to blame that they have produced a system that is so confusing that even under a reformed electoral system it is conceivable that the electorate of Lambeth would visit upon itself such an appallingly high tax.

The Government are pressing ahead with the Third Reading of the Bill because they do not have a proper electorate system for local authorities and they do not have a proper tax base for local government. The very fact that they are prepared to proceed to Third Reading shows clearly that they are not so handicapped as they pretend in their ability to do something about the situation. They are proceeding here with primary legislation, but in the discussions that have been referred to which I and my hon. Friends have had with Ministers the Government have been very shy about having primary legislation. They did not want to face the problems involved in bringing legislation before the House which might abolish the poll tax and replace it or modify it radically. That legislation might have been more welcome to this side of the House than the Bill we are now discussing.

Why are the Government so shy about primary legislation when they are prepared to undertake it in this respect? It is intriguing that they did not follow the line of primary legislation on capping which the Secretary of State had previously advocated. He put forward proposals which would have required a modification of this Bill. Under the proposals that he advanced capping would have continued, but there would then have been an election. A new election would have taken place——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech which is much wider than a conventional Third Reading speech. He has referred to electoral reform, local income tax and the general faults of the community charge. I wish that he would address himself specifically to the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Beith: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am drawing to a conclusion and pointing out why hon. Members should not vote for the Third Reading. I refer to the absence from it of the provision previously advocated by the Secretary of State under which, when all these procedures had been gone through and when the Government's intention of capping had been announced, it would then have been possible for an election to take place in which the local electors could have said, "Never mind, we will put up with this level of charge." That has not been put into the Bill. The Government have taken the opportunity of primary legislation and wasted it on fiddling around with the capping system which would not be necessary if the tax and the election system were both fair. There I rest my case. The Bill should not be given a Third Reading.

7.8 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I shall be brief because many of the points raised tonight have been discussed in Committee. As one of the Members who represent Lambeth, the borough which has featured most in this Bill in terms of the number of references made to it by other speakers, I wish to make one or two relevant points.

The Minister talked about closing loopholes. We are all very clear about this, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) put it better than I could possibly do. He pointed out that the Bill is a vindictive measure which has been introduced to try to prevent Lambeth from doing what it has proved it was legally right to do. The House needs to be reminded that what we are talking about is not Lambeth behaving irresponsibly or in a way that was outside the law. We have to remind the Minister of this repeatedly because he does not seem to take account of it. I remind him of what the judge said in court. Mr. Justice Otton said that Lambeth council had behaved reasonably and that the councillors had approached their task with care. That is important, because I am getting rather fed up with hearing people continually lambasting Lambeth council.

We all know that there is room for improvement in any local authority. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) continually make that point to the leaders of the council and to others. But for Ministers continually to attack Lambeth when Mr. Justice Otton has found that it had not acted illegally does not help to establish a good working relationship between them.

The people of Lambeth are not stupid; they are intelligent. The Labour majority in Lambeth and the percentage of people who voted Labour at the council elections increased, despite the fact that it was known that the poll tax was likely to be £548. The electorate knew that it wanted a Labour council because they were able to look across the border and see the effect of Tory councils in boroughs such as Wandsworth. People in Lambeth would obviously like a lower poll tax, but more important is what services are being delivered and how that is done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood and I realise that there have to be improvements, and those are being worked out. The district auditor has said clearly that Lambeth council faces considerable problems but that he is encouraged by recent initiatives to address the underlying weaknesses. That work is a major undertaking for the council, and I hope that the initial progress can be maintained. Lambeth council needs some support from the Government: it does not want to be attacked at every possible level and at every opportunity.

We are about to give a Third Reading to a Bill which prevents reasonable circumstances from being taken into consideration when a council is capped. We have not been able today to debate amendment No. 1 which would have taken into account the fact that no business or Government Department would expect to have to take new decisions on the basis of old and outdated information, and local authorities should be no different. They should be able to look at the changed circumstances, many of which have been outlined by other hon. Members.

For example, local authorities should be able to take into account such things as changes in population, how many people are paying their poll tax and, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, the way in which inner-city areas experience influxes of population. Even the most efficient authority, in an area where there is a willingness to pay the poll tax—which is often not the case because many simply find it difficult to do so—should still have such discretion. We have not been able to discuss today the amendment which sought to

[Miss Kate Hoey]

achieve that. A borough with high unemployment such as Lambeth cannot be treated in the same way as local authorities elsewhere which have not been capped.

The Opposition are opposed to the poll tax, the essential characteristic of which was meant to be accountability. Lambeth people voted for a Labour council on the basis of a high poll tax. The high poll tax remains, but services have had to be cut drastically and Lambeth people now face the possibility of an even higher poll tax next year because of the Government's policy and the changes which have in no way helped our borough.

The Government may think that the more vindictive they are towards the people of Lambeth, the more that they attack Lambeth council, the more that they try to publicise some of the rather silly things that any local authority might do, using that as a political weapon, the more the ordinary average decent person of Lambeth will be convinced that the only way to effect the changes that they want in their borough with a tax that they can afford will be to kick out the Government by solidly voting Labour at the next election.

7.14 pm

Mr. Illsley: I want to make only a few brief comments, because most of the arguments have already been gone through. This is a narrow Bill. The reasons for closing the Lambeth loophole are debatable and could have been motivated by political spite. It is clear that the Bill and the recently published regulations setting out the criteria for charge capping simply remove any last vestige of accountability for the poll tax. Charge capping destroyed the accountability so revered by the Government and the basis on which they put forward the poll tax as their flagship.

This year, as we have seen, not only has charge capping been retained, but so has the percentage limit on each authority's budget. As we have progressed, further restrictions have been imposed on local authorities, preventing the electorate from voting for the level of poll tax that they would like. The electorate does not have the luxury of going to the polls to vote against a poll tax which they believe is too high, because the Government have already taken the action for them, reducing it through charge capping and ensuring that charge capping passes on the full benefit, as the Minister calls it, although I would disagree.

The Bill is unnecessary. The poll tax as it stands cannot survive much longer. I was amused when the Secretary of State said last year that there would be a two-year review, which obviously puts it after the next general election. I am sure that many Conservative Members were as dismayed as I was when they heard that.

The revenue support grant levels that have been recently announced also show that the Secretary of State is rather more committed to the poll tax than he would have had us believe last year during the election campaign for the Conservative party leadership. I recall statements made at that time by all three of the main protagonists that the poll tax would be amended.

The Bill is absurd. Its main purpose is to attack a Labour-controlled authority. When an authority is being capped, it makes no sense not to take account of the information relevant at that time. The Minister said earlier that authorities should not be allowed to change their poll tax in mid-year. He said that authorities are all in the same boat. But with this Bill, they are clearly not all in the same boat because if the Bill is applied an authority has been singled out for charge capping, so it is not in the same position as the other local authorities. Therefore, it could be argued that, when such capping is applied, authorities should be able to take into account the shortfall in their collection to avoid passing that on to charge payers in the following year.

Standard spending assessments are the root of all evil when it comes to the poll tax. They are the basis of the charge and of charge capping and, when they are unfairly set, there are bound to be instances when charge capping is implemented. When an authority's standard spending assessments are held at a low level it will be forced to make cuts.

It is not simply a matter of SSA differences between areas; it is a matter of gross unfairness or, even worse, gross incompetence in setting the SSA. We have heard repeatedly today about the incompetence of local government, but perhaps it is the incompetence of the Government in setting the SSA so low that has caused all the problems relating to charge capping.

There can be no justification for the SSA differences that we highlighted in Committee. There is no justification for capping authorities when the standard spending assessment is determined on the basis of cost cutting. Obviously there is no justification for the Bill, and we shall vote against it.

7.21 pm

Mr. O'Brien: This is the fifty-second or fifty-third Bill to have been targeted by the Conservatives at local government over the past 11 years. It has been unnecessary from the very beginning. The explanatory and financial memorandum says:

"Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 imposes on charging authorities duties to set substitute amounts for their personal community charges in certain circumstances."

The circumstances referred to will arise when the Secretary of State decides that certain authorities should be capped because of the level of the charges levied to provide the services demanded by the electorate.

However, Lambeth took on and beat the Government and, as a result, we have this Bill, which I consider to be misleading in many respects and unnecessary in others. I quote again from the explanatory and financial memorandum:

"The Bill has no implications for central government finance. And it has no significant cost implications for local authorities."

That, in my opinion, is totally misleading. There is solid evidence that the Bill has, and will continue to have, financial implications for local authorities. Indeed, some of those implications will be significant.

The Audit Commission has warned the Government that in many districts more than 10 per cent. of this year's community charge proceeds may prove to be irrecoverable. According to the commission, that may result in community charge payers having to pay an additional amount of as much as £42 in 1991. The commission is issuing to local authorities guidelines for the purpose of assessing the likely extent of non-payment. That is not a Labour-controlled body—it is a Government body—yet it is warning that people will be unable to pay the poll tax

and that chasing those people will be very expensive. Thus, the Bill does have financial implications. The commission says:

"The Government, in its £381·41 target charge, has made no allowance for the non-collection facility."

I can tell the Minister that numerous local authorities are finding it difficult to collect the community charge from all the registered payers in their areas. It is recorded that more than 100,000 people who are registered in Leeds will not be residing at their permanent addresses. The Leeds city council will receive no community charge payment from those people, and it will be impossible to trace many of them as they will have left the area. Yet the Secretary of State says that the community charge level takes no account of that circumstance. It is a situation that will afflict all local authorities, particularly those in cities, which will find it most difficult to keep registers up to date. The cost of maintaining registers will have to be taken into consideration, but the Secretary of State ignores the fact that that will result in an additional burden on poll tax payers.

The Bill is targeted at local government. There is no justification for it and the Opposition will divide the House on Third Reading. We have requested that no order to cap an authority be made until the Secretary of State reports to the House the likely impact on the services that the local authority has a responsibility to deliver.

It has been pointed out that over the past 11 years the Government have repeatedly introduced legislation imposing additional responsibilities on local authorities. I refer, for instance to laws affecting children, the environment, fire services and civil defence. Housing benefit is another matter which local authorities have been required to attend to. Then there are such matters as environmental health. I put it to the House that without proper funding there will have to be cuts in services. As a result of the levels set by the Secretary of State, many of the authorities that are required to discharge these statutory responsibilities face tremendous problems in securing a collection fund capable of ensuring the provision of services. The Bill is grossly unfair and undemocratic. There is substantial evidence that it will adversely affect the ability of local authorities to discharge their statutory responsibilities. The local authority in Leeds has more statutory responsibilities than many others—responsibilities, indeed, equal to those of authorities to which the Secretary of State has given an additional allocation under the RSG formula.

Leeds has a large ethnic population, for which it has a statutory responsibility to cater. Leeds must also provide facilities for visitors. It is a regional centre, it excels in the provision of professional services and many people visit the city. That leads to greater pressure on the local authority's highway network, and traffic management facilities must also be improved. There is also a greater demand for more leisure facilities. Although a charge is made for all that, there has to be a public subsidy. The costs facing the local authority in Leeds are such that if the Secretary of State insists on expenditure being curtailed, the authority will face capping.

Because Leeds is a regional centre, the rents of commercial properties are higher than they are in many other areas and that affects the city's budget. Tourism in the area is also a growing industry. However,—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We cannot, on Third Reading, have a review of the services provided by any of the authorities that have been charge capped.

Mr. O'Brien: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was just making the point that the Local Government Finance Act 1988 includes the provisions that Ministers are now seeking in this Bill. There is no justification for this Bill.

If the 1988 Act contains the necessary provisions, why are we debating this Bill tonight? The 1988 Act includes the necessary provisions because they were intended to cover the kind of things that we have discussed today. We tabled amendments today to allow local authorities to take account of any changes in circumstances or of new information becoming available to them between the setting of their original poll taxes and the setting of the capping level. At no time in Committee or in the House tonight have the Government justified the need for the Bill. It is not necessary and it does nothing to enhance the services or the financing of local government. It is not justified and we will oppose its Third Reading.

7.32 pm

Mr. Portillo: With the leave of the House, I will reply. I sense that the House wants to vote, and the arguments have been debated fully already. I want simply to address one point that was made by several hon. Members, and in particular by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), and that is the idea that there is anything vindictive about the Bill.

The Bill is not vindictive. We do not claim that Lambeth acted illegally and the matter was tested in the courts. However, following the Lambeth case, there was a loophole which we had to fill. The hon. Member for Vauxhall wrestled with a good deal of embarrassment. She knows that her council does several daft things which she has to admit she is forced to attack from time to time. However, she is bound to that council because it is run by her party.

Vindictiveness may have occurred in Lambeth's decision to try to deny to its community charge payers the benefit of having reduced its budget. The Bill corrects that vindictiveness, and for that reason I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 225.

Division No. 45] **[7.33 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas

Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'thm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cleiland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann

Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Housing Support Grant (Scotland)

7.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the following two motions on the Order Paper: No. 3:

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

No. 4:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 2550), dated 12th December 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th December, be annulled.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I know that a considerable number of hon. Members hope to catch your eye this evening, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I therefore propose to keep my opening remarks brief.

The housing support grant system has now been with us for 12 years and the House is familiar with the way in which it operates. Essentially, housing support grant is a deficit subsidy paid to those local authorities which, on the basis of reasonable assumptions about income and expenditure, would find it difficult to meet the costs of council housing from rental income. Full details of the grant settlement for next year are set out in the relevant grant order, and I shall discuss them shortly.

I should like to express my thanks to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities with which both grant orders have been discussed. Although the convention has expressed reservations about certain aspects of the settlement, I am grateful for the constructive and helpful approach that it takes in our annual discussion of these matters.

Before commenting on next year's settlement, I propose to spend a little time on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order. It makes changes in the amounts of grant payable during the current year. It is customary to bring forward a variation order if there is a significant change in the level of interest rates estimated to apply to local authority borrowing. For example, last year we brought forward a variation order to increase the level of housing support grant in 1989-90 by nearly £5 million because the estimate of the pool interest rate in that year had increased. This year, a significant change in the estimated pool interest rate has again occurred, but this time it is in a downward direction. We now estimate that the pool or average rate of interest for 1990-91 will be 10·1 per cent. That figure may be compared with the estimate of 10·2 per cent. used in the grant calculations for the Housing Support Grant Order for 1990-91 approved by the House a year ago. Because of this reduction in the estimate of the pool rate, the eligible expenditure of local authorities on loan charges in 1990-91 is now estimated to be less than it was when estimated last January. It follows from this that authorities need less grant than anticipated. Therefore, and in accordance with the usual practice, the variation order now before the House reduces the total amount of grant payable from £59·6 million to £58 million.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have a brief question. Why are the Government so appallingly harsh and insensitive in their dealings with Inverclyde district council? The council has appalling housing, with problems of dampness, and there is massive unemployment in the area. The housing problems are a disgrace. Yet we receive no help whatever from this supposedly caring Scottish Office Minister.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have visited the hon. Gentleman's constituency and seen the housing there. Some remarkable successes have been achieved. I tell the hon. Gentleman what I tell other local authorities. Of course, we shall provide as much public expenditure as we can, but thereafter it should consider all the other possibilities and make arrangements with housing associations and, indeed, the private sector. I vividly remember one street in the hon. Gentleman's constituency where, through an arrangement with Wimpey, the derelict houses have been renovated. It was significant that those who then occupied the houses were people who had lived in the local community previously. Such possibilities should be followed up by each local council.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Minister do two things? First, will he enlarge on the strong representations which the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has made on the matter? Secondly, will he accept that local councils such as Strathkelvin and Monklands—my two district councils—are genuinely worried that the order does not reflect the needs of the area? Does he accept that if there is a moratorium on housing grants, or if the calculation of sales of council houses is not matched by events, he will accept responsibility for that, agree to review it and introduce a measure that reflects the real needs which have been brought to his attention?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman takes me away from the order, but I shall endeavour to answer his question. The crux of the matter is the gross allocation for 1990-91, announced in December 1989, of £418·3 million, excluding £3 million set aside for the urban partnerships, with the mid-year stock figure of 747,713. That represents an average investment per house of £559.

The gross allocation that we announced on 5 December for 1991-92, again excluding the £8 million set aside for the urban partnerships, is £406·8 million. The estimated mid-year stock figure is 727,277, representing an average investment per house of £559. That means that the spending per house will be maintained. However, the House must take into account that the stock decreases as a considerable number of council houses are sold. The final allocations will be made in due course.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If I may return to the orders, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

The main order for 1991-92 provides that the total grants payable next year will be £55·4 million. That sum represents the difference between the eligible expenditure and the relevant income of those authorities which, in the absence of grant, would have a deficit on their housing

revenue accounts. The main components of eligible expenditure are loan charges and management and maintenance spending. It is a deficit subsidy.

The loan charges which we estimate that authorities will have to meet in the next financial year are based on a projection of each authority's capital debt to the mid-point of the 1991-92 financial year, taking account of new borrowing and debt redemption. In order to calculate interest charges, we apply to these projections of capital debt the pool interest rate expected for local authority borrowing in 1991-92. Our present estimate of this rate is 10 per cent. I appreciate that interest rates fluctuate, but I can assure the House that, if there is a significant change in the estimate of the pool rate, we shall, as normal, bring forward an appropriate variation order. For the moment, our estimate of loan charges for all authorities in 1991-92 is £497 million.

Mr. Kirkwood: The variations in the notional interest rates are not worth a candle compared to the disruption that they will cause. Certainly they are not an accurate reflection of the real interest charges that smaller local authorities will have to pay. I understand that if one has a large debt it is possible to do a deal and finance one's borrowings at about 10 per cent. But it is impossible for smaller local authorities to do that. More importantly, will the Minister confirm that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities made representations to the effect that such changes at this stage of the game make matters doubly difficult? It is the eleventh hour in the current financial year. The sums involved are not worth the disruption that the changes will cause.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That point was raised by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) when he brought a deputation to see me. I told him and the representatives from the Western Isles and his council that, if their anxiety about the pool rate of interest was shared by other authorities, I should be happy for the Department and COSLA to pursue the matter. The system which has operated for years was used in this case and the Western Isles received the second highest subsidy in Scotland—almost £4 million in housing support grant. That amounts to over £32 per week for each Western Isles council tenant. The national taxpayer contributes more towards the cost of Western Isles council housing than the council tenants.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East) *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I wish to develop the argument. The hon. Gentleman can intervene again in a moment if he wishes.

The other major item of expenditure on housing revenue accounts is management and maintenance of the housing stock. Our estimate of eligible management and maintenance spending in 1991-92 is based on an assumed average spending level of £458 per house; that represents a 12·5 per cent. increase over the equivalent average for the current year. Hon. Members will be aware that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities considers that that is not enough. On that point, I do not find its arguments convincing. During the current year, of the 21 authorities in receipt of grant, 10 are spending less on management and maintenance than the amount assumed in the grant calculations. That suggests that our management and maintenance assumption for grant purposes is not only reasonable but realistic.

On the income side, we are assuming that rents in 1991-92 will in each authority be set at an average level of £23·97 per house per week. That also represents an increase of 12·5 per cent. above the assumed rent for the current year. I stress that the rent figure of £23·97 which I have quoted is not a forecast of the average council rent next year; nor is it a recommendation to authorities about their rent levels for next year. It is the average rent which, for the purpose of grant calculations, we consider authorities should reasonably receive. The actual rent levels of individual authorities may be higher or lower, depending on their decisions about income and expenditure. I shall discuss in a few moments the implications of the subsidies settlement for actual rents.

Mr. McAllion: The Minister should know that Dundee expects its average rent level to increase to £28·18 next year simply because, once again, the Government refuse to give any housing support grant whatever to the council. Why are the Government prepared to subsidise the borrowings of owner-occupiers in Dundee such as me but are not prepared to give a single penny to subsidise the borrowings made on behalf of the district council tenants by Dundee district? He will be aware that Dundee tenants are paying 67p out of every pound to the moneylenders to which the Government force Dundee district council to turn.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman why the allocations, as they stand, have been made to Dundee. I repeat that the final allocations have not been made. The provisional gross allocation announced for Dundee on the housing revenue account block amounts to £17·39 million. I am pleased to have been able to maintain Dundee's allocation at the same level as the corresponding figure for the current financial year. On a per house basis, there will be an increase of just over 5 per cent., from £498 to £524, per house. That means that the council should be in a position to maintain investment in its own housing stock at the level planned for 1990-91.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): With regard to the intervention of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), will my hon. Friend confirm that housing benefit paid through the councils in Scotland was in excess of £380 million? That makes a bit of a nonsense of the hon. Gentleman's claim about the Government helping only those who have private dwellings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: More than £380 million is spent through housing benefit on local authority tenants. That does not take into account New Towns' tenants, Scottish Homes' tenants or other tenants in the private sector. That £380 million is a substantial sum of money.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): When will the Minister realise that housing benefit is a subsidy to the person who is in desperate poverty and not to the housing authority? If everyone was well paid, there would not be any housing benefit, but I bet that there would still be mortgage tax relief.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I appreciate that the Government's policy has been to move away from generalised subsidies to targeting those subsidies much more to the individual. The levels of housing benefit have increased enormously in the past 10 years.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

I wish to draw to the attention of the House one important aspect of the Housing Support Grant Order. Some time ago the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) complained that the costs incurred by local authorities in dealing with homelessness had to be met from the housing revenue account and were therefore financed from council rents. With the agreement of COSLA, I have made it clear to all local authorities that that practice should stop. Therefore, local authority expenditure on homelessness, such as the cost of running homeless persons' units and the provision of assistance to voluntary organisations, will now be met from the general funds of authorities. That expenditure has been taken into account in determining next year's aggregate external finance settlement so that the burden will be shared between the taxpayer and the community charge payer.

One area of homeless expenditure, however, must continue to be met from housing revenue accounts for statutory reasons—the net costs of local authority hostels. It is our intention to bring forward legislation to exclude those costs from local authority housing revenue accounts as soon as an appropriate opportunity is available. In the meantime, we have made arrangements to ensure that the net costs of all local housing authority hostels in Scotland will be met by the Government through housing support grant. Those arrangements have been given effect in the main order before the House.

I invite hon. Members to note that the housing support grant hostel portion of £1,425,314 will be distributed among the 15 authorities shown in schedule 3 to the order. If we had not changed the arrangements, only five authorities would have received a share of a total hostel portion of only £384,000. The House will not be surprised to learn that the change has been welcomed by COSLA.

Our aim in providing that additional grant assistance through the HSG and revenue support grant is to ensure that local authorities are properly resourced to deal with homelessness. It is not, of course, the final or definitive answer to the problem of homelessness, but it is one example of the way in which the Government are prepared to help local authorities in that respect.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Minister aware that Renfrew district council has been allocated £28,500 for homeless hostel accommodation? Does he realise that one can hardly buy a single-end in Paisley for that sum? How far will £28,500 go in helping the homeless in Renfrew? The Government live in cloud cuckoo land.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Each authority knows its own problems and its own stock as well as, if not considerably better than, anyone else. It is for each authority to work out its priorities within the framework of its allocation. I expect authorities to give priority to homelessness.

General fund contributions represent a subsidy from community——

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should get on, but I am willing to give way.

Mrs. Fyfe: What is the position of battered women in Scotland? The hostel accommodation provided for them meets just one tenth of actual need as estimated by refuge organisations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We changed the law in the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990 so that battered wives should be considered as homeless persons and counted as such. That change was welcomed. Before Christmas we also announced an additional allocation, extra to the resources originally allocated. We are now in discussion with four cities, including the hon. Lady's, and we hope to make the detailed allocations to those cities as soon as practicable when we have all the information. No doubt the hon. Lady's concern will be one of the issues under consideration.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot resist my hon. and learned Friend.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Has my hon. Friend noticed that some local authorities, including my own, are not getting a bean out of this? People who live in modest circumstances are contributing to the constituents of Opposition Members in Dundee and elsewhere. That is what lies behind my hon. Friend's announcement tonight.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. and learned Friend makes a relevant point. When I visited his district council——

Mr. McAllion: The hon. and learned Gentleman's council is the only one on Tayside getting any Government grant. Our constituents are subsidising his.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman will get an opportunity to speak in the course of the debate.

When I visited my hon. and learned Friend's district council, it was clear that it was interested in Scottish Homes' projects. Assistance is therefore available from a number of different hands.

Mr. McAllion *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot make the hon. Gentleman's speech for him.

General fund contributions represent a subsidy from community charge payers to council tenants. Such subsidies are indiscriminate as they benefit all council tenants regardless of their personal circumstances. They are unnecessary to the extent that tenants who are unable to meet the costs of their housing receive assistance in the form of housing benefit. Therefore, I make no apology for our proposal that 48 of the 56 local housing authorities will be barred from estimating for such a contribution next year. The remaining eight authorities will be allowed to budget for varying levels of contribution amounting in total to £2·2 million. The level of those contributions has been calculated as the amounts necessary to restrict the average rent increase in each of the authorities concerned to a maximum of £2·50 per house per week.

I estimate that the combined effect of the subsidy proposals before the House will be that the overall average rent increase for council tenants in Scotland will be about £1·24 per house per week, or 5·9 per cent. I should emphasise that that forecast is based upon the assumption that authorities will increase their spending on management and maintenance by 12·5 per cent. per house above their budgeted levels for the current year. That would bring average rents to a level of £22·14 per house per week in 1991-92. I do not regard such rent levels as unreasonable or excessive—they are lower than the current average rent levels of New Towns' tenants at £23·22 and Scottish Homes' tenants at £23·81. They are certainly well below those of local authorities in England at £23·74. I should add that those local authority tenants in receipt of housing benefit are protected against rent increases.

I believe that the proposals put forward tonight constitute a fair and reasonable subsidy package. They set an acceptable balance between the interests of the council tenant, the community charge payer and the taxpayer. We have consulted authorities about the orders, and I commend them to the House.

8.9 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I have listened many times to this Minister and to previous Ministers speaking about housing in Scotland. I despair of their ever understanding that Scotland has a housing crisis, especially in the public sector, and that that crisis has existed for far too many years.

The Minister made it clear that many local authorities receive no grant whatever from central Government—either in housing support grant or through the general fund contribution. I point out to the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) that, of the three local authorities in the Tayside region—Angus, Dundee and Perth and Kinross—only Perth and Kinross receives any grant; the other two receive no grant whatever. The collusion between the two Members in suggesting otherwise is wholly unfair.

Every time the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, he reads a brief that is complacent, to say the least, and paints a picture of housing in Scotland that no one—except Ministers and, presumably, the advisers who write their speeches—would recognise. Perhaps even they do not recognise it. Certainly no local authority facing the continuing deterioration of its housing stock, no housing charity and no academic researcher would recognise it. Most important, no tenant paying ever-higher rent for ever-poorer housing would see the house in which he or she lives depicted anywhere in the Minister's speech.

Everyone involved in Scottish housing has tried to show the Minister that there is a crisis. As long ago as 1986, the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities spelt it out. Using Scottish Office statistics, the convention showed that more than 356,000 houses needed modernisation, 88,000 needed rewiring, 234,000 suffered from damp or condensation and more than 153,000 needed major or structural repairs. I make no apology for repeating those figures. I do so practically every time I make a speech on housing. No Minister has yet been able to refute them, no Minister has been able to say that they are incorrect and no Minister has been able to produce alternative figures.

Whether through housing support grant, through general fund contributions or through capital allocations, the Government have failed to provide local authorities with the funds that would allow them to tackle this appalling problem. The crisis has almost certainly deepened since 1986. Ever-deeper cuts have meant insufficient money being spent on basic repairs and modernisation. The orders are part of that pattern. They represent cuts in housing expenditure that can only drive rents ever higher and lead to a poorer repair service and a further deterioration in Scotland's housing stock.

Before Christmas, the Minister seemed to recognise, at least in part, the desperate plight of the growing army of homeless young people. It appears that that recognition was short-lived. There is little point in the Minister's giving money to local authorities to spend on hostels for the homeless if he then takes all that and more away by other means, thus reducing the authorities' capacity to provide permanent homes for those same homeless people. There is no point in providing hostel accommodation if fewer houses are available for the homeless once their spell in hostel accommodation is up.

Let us look at the figures showing the total resources that local authorities in Scotland will have to spend on housing this year. The general fund contribution is to be reduced from £3 million to £2 million. If that is all that the Minister proposes to allow, there is little point in keeping the general fund contribution; one might almost say that it should be abolished. Only eight Scottish local authorities can use it. Housing support grant is to be reduced from £58 million to £55 million. Capital consents—the money that local authorities can borrow to spend on new buildings and major developments—have been reduced from £459 million to £415 million. Local authorities expected the total to rise, at least in line with inflation—from £520 million to £572 million—rather than being reduced to £472 million. That represents a cut in real terms of £100 million in the money that will be spent by local authorities on housing in Scotland during the coming year—hardly the increase that the Minister tried to pretend would take place.

Ten years ago, housing support grant was £228 million—in cash terms, not real terms. The general fund contribution—or rate fund contribution, as it then was—provided a further £100 million. Next year, the two together will provide only £57 million.

COSLA estimates that, since 1979, more than £1·5 billion of direct Government support has been cut from housing in Scotland. The House should remember that those are cash figures. In real terms, the facts are even more catastrophic. In 1979, 47 per cent. of local authority housing costs came from rents, 39 per cent. from housing support grant and 14 per cent. from the rate fund contribution. This year, 93 per cent. will come from rents, 7 per cent. from housing support grant and less than 1 per cent. from the general fund contribution.

All that has placed an intolerable burden on tenants. Rents in Scotland have risen from an average of £4·92 per week in 1979 to an average of £20·88 this financial year. COSLA expects that average to rise by more than £3 a week next year—whatever the Minister may claim to the contrary. A comparison of Scottish rents with equivalent rents in the north of England and the midlands will show the Minister that many Scottish authorities' rents are now far higher than those in England. He can arrive at the overall English average only by including the London boroughs and authorities in the south-east of England.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): What happens to those in receipt of housing benefit when local authorities push rents up? Is that increase paid for from the public purse?

Mr. Maxton: If local authorities—especially Labour local authorities—had some way of increasing rents only for those on housing benefit and of keeping rents down for the others, the hon. Gentleman might just have an argument. But every time local authorities increase their rents, they have to increase rents for all tenants, including those who fall just outside the housing benefit range, who are in the poverty trap. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that.

Rents in Scotland have risen on average by 350 per cent. since 1979. That is well above the rate of inflation. At the same time, the Government have continued to subsidise home owners through mortgage tax relief. We are not opposed to such relief for standard rate taxpayers, but we believe that there should be equality of treatment. Last year, mortgage payers in Scotland—including me, I admit—received £470 million in subsidies compared with the £58 million that the local authorities received for their tenants. Hon. Members may not realise that that £470 million is only about 6·5 per cent. of the United Kingdom total, which now runs at £6·5 billion. The Labour party seeks equivalence of treatment in those matters.

I accept that the variation order does not involve large sums of money. However, it cuts housing grant by £1·6 million at a time when more, rather than less, needs to be spent on Scottish housing. The Minister explained that this year's housing support grant was based on an interest rate of 10·2 per cent. The Minister has now concluded that a projected interest rate of 10·1 per cent. is more appropriate. Given the Gulf war and the present economic crisis, I do not understand how he reached that conclusion. I see no evidence to suggest that interest rates will fall. The Minister was asked by COSLA to delay his decision until he saw the economic position, but he refused. More importantly, he refused to give a guarantee that if his estimate was wrong, he would come back to the House with another variation order to increase the grant. I am happy to give way if he would like to give that guarantee now.

On the main Housing Support Grant Order, I have already shown that there is a further reduction in grant. The Minister described his decision and the increases as realistic. The Government will give an allowance of £458 per house for management and maintenance. This year local authorities are spending £485 per house and they expect to spend £543 per house next year just to maintain the present level of service. There is a significant difference. The housing support grant settlement should have been £62 million more simply to allow local authorities to stand still on housing expenditure.

Some authorities may be in trouble, too, over the element in their grant for loan charges. The Minister mentioned the Western Isles. That council believes that its grant, based on the average of Scottish interest rates, is far too low. Most of its loans have been taken out since 1975 at high interest rates; therefore it cannot compensate with the lower interest rates from before 1975. As a result, Western Isles council is faced with having to increase its rents by a minimum of £6·50 a week. It can do that only if it cuts maintenance costs by half.

While capital allocations are not officially part of the debate, we cannot ignore them when considering the money to be spent on public housing in Scotland. Here, too, cuts are taking place. Net consents—the money which local authorities can borrow without consideration of house sales—have risen by £24 million in the capital allocations given by the Minister, but expected receipts from the sale of houses have fallen by £68 million. As a result, local authorities will have £44 million less to spend this year on new build, redevelopment and help to the private sector. Yet again the Government refuse to recognise that there is a crisis in Scottish housing. They do not care that thousands of their fellow Scots live in substandard housing, with their health and the health of their children affected by dampness and cold. People on low wages, just outside benefit level, are struggling to find ever-increasing rents and are forced to trim their spending on food and heating. That is intolerable in a civilised society. The callous disregard of the Government and their Back-Bench Members for the crisis is disgraceful.

However, let me be marginally generous to the Minister: I do not think that he understands or knows what is happening. With his income, he does not appreciate the housing problems of other people. I should like to finish with an apocryphal story, perhaps, about the Minister, which illustrates well his total lack of understanding of Scottish housing and which also shows that he has no right to be a housing Minister.

On one occasion, when travelling in his official car in Scotland with a junior civil servant, to make polite conversation he asked the young man where he lived. The young man said that he had a flat in such-and-such a street in Edinburgh. The Minister replied, "That is very interesting: I have got a flat just around the corner. Tell me, where do you live at the weekends?" I think that that sums up the Minister's lack of understanding about housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is misquoting a piece of gossip produced in the *Glasgow Herald*. The last story was that this was a conversation overheard at an airport. There is only one senior official in the housing department in that category, and I know very well who it is.

Mr. Maxton: I will not reveal my source, but I assure the House that it was not idle gossip overheard anywhere. It came from a fairly reliable source. The story sums up the Government's attitude to housing and the Minister's understanding of housing. I ask my hon. Friends to vote against the orders to show our contempt for the Government's housing policy.

8.24 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): While I would not use the adjectives that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) used in opening his speech, it is no use trying to hide the fact that there are many housing problems in Scotland. Not that they are particularly new—in all the housing debates stretching back to 1964, one recalls criticism of the Government in power, whether Labour or Conservative, for not putting sufficient resources into housing. There is no doubt that housing is sometimes short in quantity, sometimes short in quality,

and sometimes both. We must try to move faster towards the production of houses of the standard that we require in the 1990s than we have over the last 20 years or so.

Some authorities have exceptionally good housing records; they have modernised existing houses and have built good new houses. It is a major worry that so many poor houses were built in the 1950s when everyone was cutting costs to the bone. The result was condensation, dampness and virtual reconstruction in the 1980s and inevitably in the 1990s. We have a long way to go before we can say that in Scotland we are even moderately satisfied with the overall quality and quantity of houses.

There have been 220,000 houses built since 1979. Successful council house sales have brought capital receipts to local authorities. One is concerned about the fact that more than 20,000 houses are empty in Scotland at any one time. That makes one raise more than one eyebrow about the quality of housing management in some areas.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that Scottish Homes, a Government quango, has refused repeatedly to repair steel-framed houses in my constituency. Those houses may be regarded as substandard by Scottish Homes management, but it is utterly disgraceful that it is increasing rents by 14 per cent. in April when it is not doing the basic work required on those houses. What does the hon. Gentleman say about that?

Sir Hector Monro: I am coming to Scottish Homes; it was a great initiative of the Government and of my hon. Friend the Minister. Like the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), I look forward to action by Scottish Homes in my constituency. I have raised the issue of the condition of some of the houses managed by Scottish Homes and so far I have had a negative response to requests for early improvement. I should like Scottish Homes to be much more active. I do not know the position in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I hope that when the Minister replies he will say more about Scottish Homes. I should like to know what capital investment Scottish Homes is likely to make in my constituency in the coming financial year.

My hon. Friend the Minister was good enough to visit housing in Nithsdale in my constituency last autumn. I think that he was impressed by some of the new developments and by the housing manager and his staff. There is certainly disappointment there and in Annandale and Eskdale because those areas have not received a larger share of the cake that the Minister has been able to distribute under this order, under the housing revenue account, under the non-housing revenue account to a lesser extent, and, equally importantly, under capital consent. District councils are anxious to get on with improving their housing and with building new ones. To do that they must have more capital consent and more resources.

Last summer we held a useful debate on housing in the Scottish Grand Committee. I told the Minister then of my grave concern about homelessness. I have yet to see any dramatic improvement in this critical problem. I asked the Minister then and subsequently what steps were being taken to get to the bottom of the problem, which is not solely a matter of insufficient housing. People come to Dumfries from Ireland, the Western Isles, the Highlands and central Scotland and in no time at all reach a high position on the housing list because they are homeless. That is most unfair to those who have lived in the area for many years and are looking forward to having a house when they get married—yet these outsiders jump to the top of the list.

I hope that great organisations such as Shelter, Age Concern and the Church of Scotland will make every effort to find out more about the root causes of this national problem, which is not merely to do with a lack of houses. Perhaps we could persuade people to stay a little longer with their parents or to move to areas with available housing. That might alleviate the problem to some extent.

I urge the Minister to reconsider how district councils should allocate priority between those who claim—frequently rightly—to be homeless. The problem is getting worse, certainly for single-parent families. I often meet teenage girls with young children who, unfortunately, have been asked by their parents to leave home, even though they have recently had babies. We must try to find out why so many of these young girls are starting families when the fathers are not interested in sharing a home with them or even in helping to pay towards the maintenance of their children. Many of our problems of housing and homelessness stem not just from insufficient housing but from major issues to do with morality.

The Minister has worked hard at housing, especially with Scottish Homes. I should like to know more about what Scottish Homes proposes to do and about where it proposes to do it in the coming year. The organisation has been given a good lead by many of the housing associations. I offer warm praise to Loreburn in my area which has successfully built a large number of houses, many of them for people with special needs, and which plans many more developments. The Minister should encourage housing associations as much as he can. I should like Scottish Homes to share their enthusiasm; and perhaps it will—after all, it has not existed for long. I should like it to take more initiatives and to embark on more expenditure to modernise present stock and to help provide new homes.

Rather than going through the statistics in the orders, I should like to leave with the Minister the general impression that we have a great deal still to do before the quantity and quality of housing in Scotland can be called adequate. I appreciate that this year is financially difficult, given the Gulf crisis and rising costs, but when resources become available I hope that the Minister will agree that greater priority should be given to housing.

8.35 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I do not agree with what the Minister said about housing in Scotland. Of course, every local authority can point to model housing estates, and Glasgow is no exception. But hon. Friends who have been involved in recent by-elections will agree that every community has its bad housing estates too—for instance, in Govan, in Tewanhill and in other areas that have come to be known as wine alley. There is one in Paisley, too. Some of this housing is in deplorable condition not through any fault of the local authority but because of a history of serious social problems.

The Minister has not faced up to this crisis; he certainly has not tried to help local authorities. He knows full well

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

that the provisions that we are debating are a follow-up to the housing support capital allocation announced in December, as a result of which every local authority in Scotland felt sadly let down by the Government.

My local authority in Glasgow had planned an investment programme of £120 million. Because of the Government's decision, that has fallen to £87 million—a cut in real terms of 20 per cent. That will affect the current budget but, by their very nature, delays in this year's housing programmes—many have already been delayed—have consequences for 1993 too, as the Minister knows.

Every time housing is debated in this Chamber the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) mention peripheral estates in Glasgow, often blaming the city of Glagow for them——

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn *rose*——

Mr. Martin: The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that my colleagues want to speak and that it would be unfair of me to give way to him in such a brief debate. I know that I mentioned him, but he will have a chance to respond later.

Conservative Members blame the local authorities for peripheral estates in which houses sit empty. The Minister and the Secretary of State have often said that we cannot build more houses in these cities, because plenty of them are lying empty. The local authorities have embarked on joint ventures with Scottish Homes and with the private sector, and sometimes they would prefer to do what the Government want them to do: to rehabilitate houses and put them up for sale. However, because of recent Government decisions, these houses will continue to lie empty, and for so long that they will not be able to be rehabilitated. The vandals will move in, the weather will take its toll and mass demolition will follow. Then the Tory press and the Government will blame the Labour-controlled authority.

Many of my constituents live in fear of break-ins by people with drug problems. My house was recently broken into and I understand that the perpetrator was a drug addict. That is happening not just to me but to people who are the poorest of the poor. They are living in fear.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): You are not poor.

Mr. Martin: My hon. Friend says that I am not poor. I am not as rich as he is, but I am certainly not poor, although I have not got to the Council of Europe yet.

Council tenants live in fear of break-ins and have made representations about it to the local authority. It was planned that many projects in my area would be brought forward to give protection to tenants, particularly the elderly and the disabled, but once again, because of the Government's decision, these elderly and disabled tenants will not get the alarm systems that would make them feel secure, particularly on winter nights. The Minister must know that these are the fears expressed by people when they come to constituency surgeries. They say that they want to move out. I tell them that theirs is a good house, but they persist in wanting to move because there have been too many break-ins in the area.

The Minister must help local authorities to ensure that people stay in the housing estates and thus relax the pressure on the houses that are in high demand. That applies particularly to multi-storey flats. I must have more of them than any hon. Member, and I know that those which have a concierge service to stop outsiders coming and going have now become desirable places in which to live. The children have been moved out of them and they are for middle-aged couples and sometimes single people, who are keen to live there provided that they have protection at the front door and also provided that vandalism does not take place in the lifts, causing them to have to walk up 20 flights, or 30 in the case of the Redwood flats. It would be simple and cheap to get this concierge service into every multi-storey block in Glasgow, but we need the help of the Minister to do it.

Housing officials have now identified Coll Place in my constituency, a full multi-storey block which is now empty, as somewhere that can be turned into furnished accommodation for students and young people who are not interested in long-term lets. But I now have a full multi-storey block which is empty; there is not a soul in the entire building. It is depressing for the people in that community. The officials tell me that, because the Secretary of State will not help, there will be no money available. Nor am I making a case for my own constituency alone. They have identified other places—Castlemilk, Pollok, Easterhouse and other parts of the city—where projects will have to be abandoned.

One would have thought, however, that the Conservative party's pet organisation would be Scottish Homes. One would have thought that, with a community-based housing association movement and all the other projects in which Scottish Homes is involved, it was something the Tories would want to give money to, but I am told that in real terms the non-housing revenue allocation expenditure will drop by 17 per cent. What that means is that where young couples are not being allocated houses, because the areas are popular and the houses have been bought by the sitting tenants, they are turning to Scottish Homes. But Scottish Homes cannot help them unless they get the finance. The Minister knows that.

The Conservatives have always claimed to be the champions of the private sector, but in Glasgow there are 400 cases in a backlog of statutory repairs required in the private sector. The 400 cases are mainly of elderly people living in old tenements in the Duke street area of my constituency down in Denistoun, where the roofs leak and the walls are damp and no help is forthcoming from the local authority. What annoys me is that when grants for repairs are refused it will not be the Government or St. Andrew's House who will get the blame but George Square and district councils.

In my constituency we have "four in a block" houses. They are popular. They have side doors and a garden and are very good for families. I had one and was happy for the children to be brought up in such a house. It only needs one tenant to buy one of those four in a block when the other three are still owned by the local authority and problems arise. The local authority may carry out improvements to the block but, because of a decision by the Government, it cannot give any grant to the tenant who has bought his house, even though he has been encouraged by the Government through leaflets and press

propaganda to buy his house and even though he has been told that if the house is old he will be given a grant to do it up.

I am not opposed to tenants buying their houses. When I was a councillor in Glasgow I supported the selling of selected houses to try to encourage young couples to stay in communities consisting mainly of elderly people. But I put it to the Minister that if he is really proud of what local authorities are doing—and I know that he is because he loves coming to open new projects; he has been up to Springburn and he has had a great welcome, and there are plaques on rehabilitated houses to show that he has opened them—and if he wants that positive action to continue, he must help the local authorities rather than hinder them.

8.47 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) has demonstrated his deep knowledge of housing in his constituency. Through his speech ran the thread of what he wants, which is some innovative and progressive thinking. That is really what he was saying. We have had problems in public sector housing in Scotland for a long time. Anyone who thinks differently is not facing up to the real issues. Many of our citizens have been forced by circumstances to live in totally unsuitable houses and have had to put up with condensation and damp. I vividly remember our inspection of houses during visits to Glasgow and elsewhere, but particularly to some of the housing schemes in Glasgow. The desperate problems that must be tackled were quite obvious.

There is also the problem of "homelessness". It is rather an umbrella word because it covers everyone who has no permanent home. Hon. Members will know that for a long time I have been interested in the problems of people who find themselves in this position. I cannot describe my investigations as comprehensive or sufficiently deep to provide complete answers, but at least I care enough about these things to become involved. That is true of everything that I do. Opposition Members may doubt some of the proffered solutions, but I care as deeply as they do about problems on housing estates. An Opposition Member who is present in the House grew up on the same housing estate as I did.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Gentleman appears to be concerned about this matter. I assume that he will join us in the Lobby to show his contempt for Government cuts.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should be patient. I shall deal with his speech in a moment. His background and circumstances are quite different from mine and we need no lectures from him or anyone else. I hope that we are all looking for ways to improve the lot of people whose circumstances are totally unsatisfactory, although we may disagree on how we can achieve that end.

I shall now deal with the humbug in the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). He accused my hon. Friend the Minister of not caring and not understanding. That is a travesty of the truth because every hon. Member knows that the Minister is one of the most caring and interested Members in the House. The hon. Member for Cathcart will know that many people leave Edinburgh at weekends to come to ski in my constituency. That means that many people living in flats in Edinburgh are not there at the weekends and it is nonsense to pretend otherwise. In this modern and mobile world it is wise to concentrate on those who have problems and say "Good luck" to those who have not.

We are speaking about taxpayers' support for housing. In Scotland more than 20,000 council houses are empty. Hon. Members have spoken about some of the problems and I have been interested in some of the solutions. I have many times criticised Dundee district council, but I hope that that council will agree that I also compliment it when that is required. Some of the innovative housing projects and new schemes near the centre of Dundee are a credit to that council. They are also a credit to co-operation among the private sector, the housing associations and the district council. We must continue to move down such innovative routes.

The hon. Member for Cathcart had some nasty things to say about mortgage tax relief. Presumably he was speaking for the Opposition and would suggest that such tax relief should be abolished. Mortgage tax relief allows people to keep their own money. We are discussing how taxpayers can assist people who are in need, and mortgage tax relief is one aspect of the housing issue. The Government's policy of selling houses and giving people the opportunity to buy at substantial discounts is another way to ease Scotland's housing problems. One of the most notable features of housing estates on which houses have been sold is the improvement in the environment. On such estates vandalism generally decreases because people do not vandalise their own property.

Opposition Members constantly overlook the fact that since 1979 Government policy has sought to direct taxpayers' funds to people in need and not to offer a blanket approach to problems. I approve of that because if public funds are not targeted they will not provide good value. Housing benefit has been deliberately targeted at those whose income, wherever it comes from, is below a certain standard. That benefit, which is taxpayers' money, has risen to more than £380 million in the past year and is for council house tenants only. *[Interruption.]* Allowing someone to keep his own money is not the same as directing taxpayers' money to those in need. A better understanding of the use of finance would take us nearer to implementing some of the innovative solutions with which I agree.

Housing benefit is paid to the people in greatest need, and the opportunity to buy at discounted prices goes to another group. Now we are moving into the area highlighted by the hon. Member for Cathcart which is just outside the area of housing benefit. There will always be people who are just outside that area and the Government rent-to-buy scheme is deliberately designed for such people. They can buy their property at a discounted price and enter into an arrangement whereby if at some future date the property is sold they will share the increase in its value.

All those schemes deal with social problems, such as the problem of vandalism on many large estates. We must deal with that and part of the solution—not the only solution—is to give more people a stake in their property, thus reducing vandalism and increasing in the community the feeling that the property is theirs and that they can take steps to protect it. I am astonished that some Opposition Members cannot see the benefit of that. The rent-to-buy scheme, which is still in its early stages but doing well, deals with that.

[Mr. Walker]

I shall now deal with those who are in need of houses for whatever reason. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I should like to call all hon. Members who wish to speak. To that end, it would be helpful if hon Members did not engage in sedentary barracking but saved their breath until they were called.

Mr. Walker: Opposition Members think that they are being flippant and clever. If they are concerned about those in real need they should separate them from people who are not in real need, of which there are some.

Let us look at the casual homeless problem. In my constituency we understand that because we have much of it. Berry pickers come to Blairgowrie and the surrounding area. Many of them have homes in other parts of Scotland, but when they find that they like my constituency they decide to stay. I have dozens of examples from my surgery. That problem must be addressed by Perth and Kinross district council because those people register themselves as homeless and are put up in accommodation such as caravans. We must not confuse those people with people who are genuinely homeless as a result of factors over which they have no control. Such people are placed on housing lists for many reasons. Perhaps they got married and went to live with their parents. Children invariably come along and we all know what happens in such situations. The problem is complex and not as simple as some people suggest.

I have studied the problems of people who sleep in cardboard boxes and I discovered that more of those people than I had expected said categorically that they would not accept hostel accommodation even if it were offered to them. I am delighted to say that the Salvation Army in Scotland has confirmed that more than once. Those people had chosen this particular way of life and it turned out that some had a drink problem. What I did not know, and was unable to ascertain, was whether the drink problem was the result of the way they lived or whether the way they lived was the result of their drink problem. Whatever the answer, there was some factor in their lives that was creating a difficulty.

There are some of these individuals not far from this very place just along the Embankment, if hon. Members want to talk to them. I have spoken to some of those people and they have told me that they would not go to hostel accommodation because it would interfere with their way of life. The Salvation Army has confirmed that in Scottish main cities a substantial number of such people will not accept its empty hostel beds. That is another problem to which I draw attention.

Nobody to whom I have listened who has made any attempt to study the matter thinks that if the Government give the local authorities more money in whatever way that will resolve the problem. In my view, that is a matter of hope over experience. I believe that the Government quite properly should target public funds, and I think that we could target them much more.

I believe that the voluntary bodies must be involved. The housing associations, Scottish Homes and so on must all be part of the effort to find an answer. I am very happy to say that in my constituency a number of bodies are working to try to find answers. I hope that in due course they will get the sort of assistance which they all say public funds should give. But I believe that such funds should be given only to clearly thought-out, clearly presented projects on a one-off basis. One of the great mistakes in housing in past years is that we have not looked at the revenue implications of some of the ideas. This includes the building of some high-rise flats and so on.

I have spoken for a little longer than I had intended, but hon. Members opposite provoked me to do so and I thought that I should respond.

9.2 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I propose to be brief, and I shall speak mainly about the effects of these orders on several local authorities in the highlands area. It is worth underscoring at the outset the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) in looking at the overall expenditure pattern. These orders represent in real terms, allowing for inflation, a reduction of £100 million for Scottish public housing. That is the basic position. Broken down on an individual constituency basis, although local authorities have their variations and some come off not quite so badly and others come off slightly worse, in real terms it results in a significant loss across the country as a whole.

My specific comments deal in the main with the effect of these orders on the Ross and Cromarty district council, to a lesser extent on the Inverness district council, which straddles both my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), and on Lochaber district council as well. Within the mainland highland region—though I am sure that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) will deal later with the specific problems faced by the island authorities—in that order of priority those are the areas most adversely affected.

Let me deal with the variation order first. The difference in Ross and Cromarty involves a reduction of about £60,000. In the Inverness district, the equivalent reduction is just under £50,000, and Lochaber will suffer a reduction some way below that figure.

As the Under-Secretary of State said in opening the debate, the main reason for this is the downward revision of the so-called pool interest rate on which the original grant calculations were based. The pool interest rate is reduced from 10·2 per cent. in the main order to 10·1 per cent. in the variation order. It is not realistic to suppose that Ross and Cromarty can secure borrowing at that rate of interest in the current economic climate. It may be possible that for Glasgow, where the sums involved are huge, special arrangements can be made, but for the small-scale rural authority, in the current economic climate and with present interest rates, there is no viable alternative.

During the current year, Ross and Cromarty's interest payments have increased by £345,000 above the amount allowed for in the housing support grant calculations. In addition, the amount of debt redeemed during the year is £177,000 higher than that allowed for in the calculations. As a consequence of the changes, the council is paying interest charges of £522,000 above the level assumed in the housing support grant calculations. For a council with a budget the size of that of Ross and Cromarty, a £522,000 downside in the housing budget is very serious.

The council has been endeavouring to make administrative savings and, of course, it has cut its expenditure on repairs and maintenance. Nevertheless, at this point—and the council gave me the figures today—it faces a deficit on the housing account of £240,000. With only three months of the financial year remaining, the only option available to the council is to fund certain repairs from capital expenditure. That will reduce the amount available for new build and for what was previously regarded as essential and often long overdue refurbishments and improvements. I hope that the Minister will comment, if not specifically on Ross and Cromarty, at least on the general point that I am making.

The Minister will know from correspondence between his office and myself that I can cite many examples, especially in Easter Ross, Alness and Tain, of much public dissatisfaction and frustration about the delays and cancellations of necessary improvements. There are also problems for the west coast, but I shall deal with those later.

The main order would result in a cash reduction in housing support grant of £133,000, again based on a further reduction in the pool interest rate, this time down to 10 per cent. The council believes that it will not be possible to fund replacement borrowings at that rate, given the same problems of the general economic climate. What does that mean for the rents being levied within the Ross and Cromarty district? I have read the excellent brief prepared by COSLA which has been circulated to hon. Members. It shows that over the next year the average rent rise will be £3.

Within the Ross and Cromarty district, the combined effect of the main order and the variation order will be that, at current expenditure levels, the increase in rent will be about £240 a year, which is £4·68 a week. That is the increase required to balance the housing account. It is significantly above even what COSLA estimates will be the average figure for Scotland. It is a 22 per cent. increase. That cannot be right in an area that already suffers higher general overheads for daily living, transport and travelling costs, and so on.

It must be emphasised that the only alternative available to the council that would avoid increasing rents by more than double the rate of inflation would be, as in the previous category, to transfer certain costs from revenue to capital. There are two main problems with that. First, it increases the cost of the work, and, secondly, it further reduces the ability to finance new build and improvement projects. It should be noted that the council's net consent for capital expenditure on housing has already been reduced by almost £600,000 between the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

In essence, there are three points that I wish to stress to the Minister. In terms of the local authorities—Ross and Cromarty in particular, but the same applies to the others—the calculations on which the housing support grant decisions are based have given totally unrealistic estimates of the rates at which councils in these categories are able to borrow, given current interest rates and economic forecasts. Secondly, for Ross and Cromarty district, the level of debt redemption in both the current year and next year has been seriously underestimated. Thirdly, as a result of a substantial gap between the levels of capital charges supported by the housing support grant and those incurred by the council itself there will inevitably be an excessive burden on council house rents while at the same time reducing capital allocations and therefore creating substantial delays in carrying out much needed house improvements. That is hardly a happy or successful situation for a local authority.

Given that dampness is such a problem in public authority housing in Scotland—people have long enough memories to recall the Scottish Select Committee and they will remember the report that was done in that context—and given the difficulties of geography and climate in the north of Scotland, the position is even worse there. Also, there are the extra fuel and transport costs in new build, not least for the west coast of Scotland, and the lack of private land for public housing in many parts of the highlands. Upward pressure is being exerted on house prices as a result of people decanting from central Scotland and the south-east of England and inflating property prices in the highlands. Thus, we have rising rents and lowering standards in the public sector, further pressures on local authority budgets and personal household budgets and the likely setting back or cancellation of much needed refurbishment and repair. This results in more dampness, more condensation, more frustration and more human unhappiness. That is a miserable state of affairs.

Far from coming forward with a variation order tonight to claw back still more money from the local authorities in Scotland, the Minister should be reversing spending priorities, not just for the highlands but for many other parts of the country as well.

9.12 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I shall be brief and I do not wish to be controversial because I want my point to be appreciated by both sides of the House, by all parties and all of us who live in Scotland.

Tonight we are discussing two matters, essentially: the civilisation and quality of life which a house gives to a family or the person who lives in it, wherever in Scotland it may be, and the money that local authorities spend on making that provision. One of the scandals, the vandalisms, of our lifetime has been the destruction of the extraordinarily cheap but solid and wonderful houses in the cities of Dundee and Glasgow. These houses could and should have been modernised as those that remain have been so that they are infinitely better homes than the "new build"—I use that appalling phrase in appalling English, far less Scottish, which was used by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy). I assume that he means new houses. It always has been and always will be infinitely more expensive to knock down houses that are well built and replace them with rubbish. It is one of the social scandals of our generation that in Glasgow vast schemes have been built without a pillar box or a shop. They are vast places with more people than the city of Perth. I am not criticising Glasgow, rather trying to draw attention to a problem. Money will always be limited and there will always be a complaint that not enough has been provided.

I am concerned that the money that is available should be well spent in order to achieve a single objective—to improve the environment, the housing and the dwellings, whether in Perth, Kirkcaldy, Glasgow, Dundee, Ross and Cromarty or wherever. That is the problem which hon. Members on both sides of the House should be addressing,

[Sir Nicholas Fairbairn]

rather than making party political points about whether it was a red council, blue council, pink council, tartan council or any other council that got it wrong.

We are not talking about damp in houses; we are essentially talking about what the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye called new build—whatever that is. We are talking about houses that are badly and expensively built and on which local authorities, whichever ones, spent far more money than would have been necessary if they had done up the houses that were replaced.

Mr. Kennedy: I shall not engage the hon. and learned Gentleman in a discussion about vocabulary; I rather agree with him. But will he tell me, in his analysis which is broadly correct, where between Achiltibuie and Glenelg he would renovate all the houses and so do away with new build?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I could, but it would not be useful to do so. If the hon. Gentleman was interested, I am one of the few Members of the House who could do that, but I will not. I could give him some good examples.

Mr. Kennedy: Give me one.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: For example, Achiltibuie—the hon. Gentleman pronounced that in the Scottish way, not in the English way in which he used the words new build—is one of the most sensitive villages in Scotland, and new build, as the hon. Gentleman calls it, has taken place along the shore as if Achiltibuie had none of the glorious surroundings that it has. That is a disgrace. I can tell the hon. Gentleman exactly what I would have done with Achiltibuie, and he knows it. If he represents Achiltibuie, he should be proud enough of it not to want to see it ruined in that way. Hon. Members should not imagine that I do not know about Achiltibuie. I could go right along the coast if the hon. Gentleman wanted me to from west to east, east to west and north to south. I shall not be caught out by that sort of stupid question from somebody who uses language that is incomprehensible to most hon. Members.

I am making a serious point. It is essential that we should not repeat the scandal that resulted in 50,000 or 30,000 people being dumped in what was then called new build, ripped out of the heart of Glasgow, Dundee or wherever else and dumped on the edge, adding travel costs to their expenses and putting them not into better houses but into infinitely worse houses.

That has been one of the scandals of our generation and no hon. Member on either side of the House should be talking about how much money we threw at the problem. We wasted hundreds of thousands of millions of pounds. We created social and criminal problems and a disgraceful environment for our people. Take, for instance, the street in Glasgow that runs from the High Court, where people are tried, to the Tron, where they drink. People were thrown out of there and settled in the city's environs. They were put into poor environments where they had no relationships. Now places like that street have been restored, and I am glad to say that people have come back. That, I trust, is the hope of hon. Members in all parties. However, it will be achieved only if local authorities are responsible, sensitive and careful.

9.20 pm

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Like all other hon. Members, I am once again indebted to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It always sends us excellent briefs on orders such as these. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) highlighted what I think is the main point in this brief and it is worth repeating. I refer to the fact that, in general terms, these order involve a reduction of £48 million in total resources. In real terms—when inflation is taken into account—the reduction amounts to £100 million. In view of the problems that council tenants face, that is an absolute scandal.

I was fortunate to be able to participate in the corresponding debate last year. On that occasion I drew attention to the awful Catch-22 situation affecting the 998 Winget-type houses in Provan and Shettleston in the east end of Glasgow. Suffice it to say that a year later not a single thing has been done to help any of the poor people living in these substandard houses. These orders will not improve the situation one wee bit; in fact, they will make it worse. Help for these tenants is further away than it was even a year ago.

I should like to illustrate the increasing misery that continued and repeated reductions in housing support grant cause to my constituents, living, as they do, in an area with one of the highest levels of unemployment in Scotland—in fact, the sixth highest, with 4,421 people out of work on 13 December. In addition, the constituency has one of the highest numbers of old-age pensioners in Scotland and I shall draw the plight of some of those pensioners to the attention of the House.

The Pensioners Action Group East has sent me a list of problems that a very tiny survey brought to light. Mrs. Sadie Hart, herself a pensioner and secretary of PAGE—and a person who was awarded the Lord Provost's award for her work in the community a few years ago—is rightly very concerned that many of her members may not survive this winter unless something is done to improve the housing conditions in which they are forced to live. In her letter to me Mrs. Hart states that the possibility of deaths caused by hypothermia is her greatest fear.

I should like to quote some figures contained in the report of the PAGE survey. Fifty-two people were involved—42 females and 11 males. The average age was 73, the youngest person being 60, and the oldest 93. The shortest tenancy involved was six weeks and the longest 26 years. Of the 53 people, 49 stated that they had health problems. These included arthritis, diabetes, heart conditions, thrombosis, high blood pressure, eye problems, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, bladder conditions, leukaemia, angina, asthma, fluid retention, rheumatism, osteoporosis, ulcers, bone disease, kidney complaints, strokes, spondylitis, thyroid complaints and war wounds. It is sad that in this day and age people suffering from war wounds are living in substandard houses.

Forty-four of the people surveyed stated that their houses were very cold; 46 said that the windows were very draughty; 36 use the central heating system, and 12 do not because it is too expensive. Presumably those who do not use central heating simply cannot afford it. The average cost of the heating bills over a two-month period was £97·90. The cheapest bill was £24 and the dearest was £180.

Most of the complaints were that the houses were very cold, the windows were draughty and the under-floor heating too expensive. The sad truth is that the council does not have the resources to do anything to help those tenants, most of whom are elderly ladies who live alone. We, and in particular the Government who are in charge, should be thoroughly ashamed about that.

The survey was carried out in three streets in the Sandyhills area which is generally regarded as one of the best areas in my constituency. If the survey shows the position of old people living in one of the best areas, God knows what it is like for people living in the worst houses in the worst areas. The Government do not give a damn about that. I am sorry to have to say that, but until the Minister does something, his words mean nothing.

The third east end community conference was held in October and the Scottish Office was invited to send a representative to it, but none turned up. The conference covers the former GEAR area, with which the Minister is familiar. It was horrified to be presented with the east end housing plan drawn up by the district council. It is the first thoroughly researched document about the condition of all the houses in the east end of Glasgow. If the Minister has not seen a copy of that report, I will gladly send him one. The report is a couple of inches thick.

The synopsis on investment states:

"The needs of each estate in the Council sector are analysed, calculating that £230·7 million is required to bring all houses up to modern standards including heating, insulation, security and environmental improvements."

That is not too much to ask for. The report continues:

"In a 10 year programme, a shortfall of £15 million every year requires the Council to decide on where it will concentrate its own resources, and where it will have to look to others for assistance."

My hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart was absolutely right. There is a crisis in Scottish housing which the Government are deliberately ignoring and for which they will rightly pay the penalty at the next general election.

9.26 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I must compliment Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council because I telephoned the council this evening requesting a brief and it sent me a swatch of papers. I will not read them to the House, but I have perused them and they show clearly that the council's current financial position means that, unless additional resources are made available to it, there will be a shortfall of more than £2·5 million in its capital programme for 1991-92. The programme includes figures that have been updated to current costs.

That shortfall in resources will require the district council to reconsider investment in its housing stock which will entail extremely difficult choices and decisions in relation to several essential projects. Having examined the details, it is clear that all those projects are desirable and essential to improve the housing stock. Some of them will have to be delayed and, tragically, some might have to be obliterated from the programme for many years to come.

Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council is very concerned, as I am, that no specific allocation has been made to tackle the problem of homelessness in the area. Like all hon. Members, I understand that cities have particular problems with homelessness because homeless people are attracted to cities. But that does not mean that areas like Kilmarnock do not have a homeless problem. Therefore, pro rata, such areas should have been considered seriously and finance should have been made available so that those areas can begin to tackle what is becoming a growing problem. Throughout Scotland small towns and villages need financial assistance to cope with homelessness. The Minister cannot avoid his responsibility to examine that matter.

The council's community alarm system is an important apparatus for many elderly and infirm people in Kilmarnock. It enables elderly people to have a direct connection with someone operating a central computer. That person is able to provide immediate assistance when those elderly people are in distress or trouble. The system cannot be counted in terms of money. The council should be able to bring many more elderly people into the scheme and provide them with the security that they deserve. I hope that the Minister will take cognisance of that point and reconsider the allocation of funds to Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council. Only an extra £60,000 was budgeted for the extension of that scheme this year. This should have been the year of care in the community, but the Government have put back that programme, which means so much to many elderly and infirm people.

The Minister came to Kilmarnock in 1989 and he was extremely well received. Much work was done on his behalf. When it was known that a Scottish Minister was coming to Kilmarnock, it was rather like the film the "Quiet Man". People said, "We will line up and give him stick when he gets off the train at Kilmarnock." I had to explain that it would be unlikely that he would be catching a train, as trains to Kilmarnock were few and far between. However, I convinced them that they should not only queue to see the Minister but should cheer him because we wanted the Minister to see the problems of Kilmarnock. We hoped that that would have an effect on him and that something would be done. We were very glad for the housing improvements that he helped to bring about in Kilmarnock. However, that does not negate his responsibility to continue that improvement and to help to alleviate the difficult housing problems in Kilmarnock.

The Minister must have seen, as I did when I first went to Kilmarnock 12 years ago, that the housing stock there is much better than that in many other areas. For instance, we do not have the problems associated with multi-storey blocks. By and large, the housing stock was very good. Much of it was ageing, but it was very good. A marvellous programme of refurbishment and rehabilitation has been undertaken. It must be seen to be believed.

The council was bitterly disappointed with the lack of progress made with the Minister's officials after more than one visit. The documentation I have, including copies of letters to the Department, points out the problems. They are no exaggeration. It is not acceptable that the grant is almost half what was requested. The council asked for a non-HRA capital consent of £785,000 but it was granted £408,000. Because of that, the voluntary improvement and repairs grants scheme will be suspended, possibly for a full financial year, and that is just after it has been reconstituted. Many points have been made about the depletion of housing stock in Scotland and the difficulties in repairing ageing housing stock. The voluntary improvement and repairs grants scheme must be fully operational this year.

[Mr. William McKelvey]

I now refer to Newmilns, a small town in my district. The council wished to provide grants to upgrade certain buildings. Again it looks as though that will not happen and that there will be difficulties.

A decision should be taken on whether a grant can be made available to improve Ananhill house, a listed building. Again, the figure is £50,000. As I said, the prospect of any expansion in the care scheme looks remote.

I have two further items to mention in this brief speech. The Minister will recall that when he came to see Long Park co-op scheme he was particularly keen for it to go ahead. I visited the scheme only seven weeks ago. I was impressed by the manner in which that co-op had undertaken its job and improved the standard of the housing and thereby the living standards of the people of Long Park. It now seems that there are difficulties with Scottish Development Agency funding to infill some mines under part of the secondary scheme. I hope that the Minister can do something about that. I cordially invite him to open the scheme when it is completed. I enjoy opening schemes in Kilmarnock, but I am prepared to forgo that pleasure if the Minister can come up with the money and come back to Kilmarnock. I guarantee him safe conduct.

All Opposition Members are absolutely appalled at the antics of Scottish Homes. It has increased rents throughout Scotland on average by 14·2 per cent. There is absolutely no reason for it other than, as I suspect, that pressures have been applied by the Scottish Office for it to put pressure in turn on those who continue to be tenants to buy their homes. That would remove Scottish Homes' responsibility further to improve those homes. Opposition Members universally condemn the increase.

Kilmarnock has held a policy and resources meeting and decided once again to send the A team down to meet the Minister. We are always cordially received by the Minister but neither I nor the council want to go to the expense of sending the A team down to London to make pleas which are already extremely well documented and which the Minister can read. To save us that expense and time, I ask the Minister to read the correspondence between his Department and Kilmarnock. If he makes a just judgment on the figures, I believe that the additional £370,000 that we seek—it is not a great deal—will be dispatched to Kilmarnock tout de suite.

9.37 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Minister was kind enough to dwell on the problems of Western Isles council, but he gave the wrong impression when he implied that it is somehow cushioned from the various cuts made not only this year but in previous years.

I appreciate that the Minister took time to meet a delegation from Western Isles council. Although no new money was put on the table, I felt that some progress, or potential progress, was made.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that a supplementary allocation has been made to the Western Isles for this year. It is admittedly a small sum—£130,000. The allocation was made in response to that representation.

Mr. Macdonald: That is welcome news as far as it goes. The Minister said that Western Isles council was receiving the highest support grant this year. That may be true, but, of course, the Western Isles, like many other authorities in the highlands and islands, faces considerable exceptional costs in providing public housing. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) has already detailed some of those costs.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Gentleman shares with me the distinction of representing the single-tier islands authority. Has he had an opportunity to examine the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991? The schedule to the order refers to Orkney Islands district council, Shetland Islands district council, Western Isles district council and Shetlands Islands district council. Is he aware that any such bodies exist?

Before we vote on this, perhaps you, Mr. Speaker, and your Clerk will consider whether the order is competent given that its schedule refers to bodies that do not exist.

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to give me notice of that important point—I hope that it does not nullify certain aspects of that order.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman's council will receive the highest subsidy as a result of the order, so I hope that it will be considered competent for his constituents' sake.

Mr. Macdonald: I do not want to rehearse the points already made by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye about the exceptional building costs in areas such as the Western Isles and the highlands and islands. Those regions face additional costs because materials must be imported—in the case of the Western Isles they are carried over the Minches. Councils also face additional costs for repair and maintenance because of climatic factors. The scattered nature of public housing means that it is difficult to get the economies of scale obtained elsewhere.

There is a particular problem facing the Western Isles. The council's experience of paying interest on its capital debt is different from the Scottish Office assessment of those repayments. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has already said that a large part of the explanation for the exceptional capital debt faced by councils such as the Western Isles is the recent nature of that debt. On 31 March 1990 the total capital debt faced by the Western Isles was £111 million. In 1975, at the inception of the council, the debt was a mere £15 million—the debt has increased by some 640 per cent. The total comparable debt faced by all Scotish local authorities in 1975 was £2,965 million, but in 1990 it had risen to £7,982 million. The total Scottish debt has increased by 169 per cent. compared with the 640 per cent. debt increase faced by the Western Isles. That extra debt faced by the Western Isles is due to the higher number of consents granted by the Scottish Office under both Labour and Conservative Governments. When the Western Isles council was set up under the islands authority it had a great deal of leeway because it had to catch up on spending on various aspects of infrastructure, education and housing.

The average annual interest rate faced by authorities such as the Western Isles is now higher than the average faced by other local authorities because a greater

proportion of the debt is recent debt, which is more expensive than debt incurred before 1975. In years to come one of the key problems faced by the Western Isles and other local authorities will be the repayment of debt. I am grateful that, as a result of meetings, the Minister is willing to enter into discussions with COSLA to discuss that matter.

The Minister said that if the Government's estimate of the average interest rate faced by local authorities this year turned out to be an underestimate when the figures come in some clawback arrangement will be introduced and the Government will reassess their figures for the following year to make up the difference. That does not help local authorities to plug the gap this year.

That brings me to the key point, which is that the average interest rate does not take into account the different circumstances of local authorities. The difficulty is not only that the average interest rate may be higher this year than the Government estimate but that it will affect local authorities in different ways. I seek an assurance from the Minister that he will not only reassess next year the extent to which the estimate given by the Scottish Office has fallen behind the real average but re-examine the practicality of making special arrangements for authorities that face exceptionally high interest rates because of factors that are outside their control.

9.46 pm

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): I want to draw the Minister's attention to certain areas in my constituency, starting with 1265 Pollokshaws road. In the past two years the Minister and I have become pen pals over it, but he still has not solved the problem. The complex consists of both district council housing and private housing built to a standard that has been rejected by the building societies which will not lend any money on it. The building leaks in the winter and is full of draughts in the summer. The windows and porches are full of dry rot. I have repeatedly asked the Minister to make an advance to ensure that the private owners in the complex have houses that are fit to live in. The Minister does his Pontius Pilate act and blames the district council. The council is blamed for a million things, including the fire of London and the black death. That is the only answer that we receive from the Scottish Office.

The Government continue to cut resources to Glasgow district council which, given the money, could make the residents' homes more suitable places in which to live. The district council renovated some of the homes under its control. The funny thing is that, even though the homes were renovated, people who took the Tory Government's advice and bought their homes now cannot sell them because the building societies will not lend any money to anyone who wants to buy them.

The Minister has said repeatedly over the past two years that that is not true. But the Halifax and the other building societies say, "Sorry. Too great a risk is involved in putting money into such buildings." I do not know how many times I have been to see the Minister. I am fed up with talking to him about the buildings. I have given him petitions and brought people to talk to him, but I have received no adequate response.

Perhaps as a result of pressure placed upon it the district council is engaged in a partial repair job. It is working on the windows and porches, but the roofs are left unrepaired. The residents therefore suffer the indignity of using basins, pots, pans and pails to catch the water coming through the roof. For two years or more, your Government have done nothing to alleviate that suffering.

In Minard road, in the Shawlands area of Glasgow, a woman is living in a house with no roof. There are canvas covers where the roof should be. The district council cannot give her money because you will not advance it, despite the many complaints. You say that you have no money to give the district council, then you do your Pontius Pilate act and blame the council.

Mr. McKelvey: My hon. Friend is blaming Mr. Speaker. I am sure that he means the Minister.

Mr. Dunnachie: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Lack of grants is causing many problems for owner-occupiers in Pollok constituency and you and your party—sorry, Mr. Speaker—the Minister and his party have done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the people.

I could talk about Darnley; you know about Darnley, you have been there and you have seen the conditions in which people have to live. You have done nothing about that. In South Nitshill they have been waiting 30 years for modernisation; again, you have turned a blind eye. In central Pollok, again you have turned a deaf ear. In Kennishead there is the only multi-storey housing co-operative in Britain or Europe, and you have done nothing to help the people who are trying to help themselves. In God's name, will you do something to help the people of Pollok who are trying to make their houses fit to live in?

9.50 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Mr. Speaker, you certainly took a drubbing in that speech. It is not my intention to hold you responsible any further. I want to direct my remarks to the person who is responsible. The Minister is following the wrong policy. Obviously Cabinet sub-committees have lost the argument about the amount of resources available for Scottish housing.

The fundamental flaw in Government policy is that they believe that tenure is the way to solve the Scottish housing problem. That was put rather well by David Comley, the director of housing for Glasgow city council, in a speech in February 1989 at the Scottish branch conference in Aviemore of the Institute of Housing. He said:

"But, first, let's be clear what the fundamental problems of Scotland's housing are—poor quality, lack of investment, poverty".

There is a clear link between poor housing and economic activity, employment and wages. David Comley went on to give figures on two aspects of the problem:

"The Grieve Report, commissioned by Glasgow District Council, called for

—the investment of £1,720m from all sectors in Glasgow's housing, including £550m for the peripheral estates.

—the write off of the city's housing capital debt, currently £1·25 billion, as a contribution to this."

There is no question about it: the people who benefit most from the housing problems in Glasgow are the moneylenders. We have only to consider the extent of the loan charges in the information before us to see the truth in that. David Comley also said:

"The Government seems to be pre-occupied with tenure; it sees the low level of home ownership and of private renting as the basis of Scotland's and Glasgow's housing problem and a major contribution to economic problems. My view,

[Mr. Jim Sillars]

supported by the reports I have mentioned, is that lack of investment and the resulting condition of the housing stock, regardless of tenure, are the problems."

Those of us who represent constituencies in Glasgow know that there is 100 per cent. truth in what David Comley said almost two years ago.

Mr. Dunnachie: A good Labour man.

Mr. Sillars: I will not repeat that because it is not a sensible comment.

If we are seeking solutions to the housing problem, two things should happen in the forum where policy is made. First, the cry of despair of the people who have no homes, who are in overcrowded accommodation or who are badly housed—the people we meet in our surgeries—must be heard. It is not often that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) and I agree, but I should like to pay him a compliment because in his speech he certainly imported into this forum the human problems which all of us meet day after day.

Secondly, we need a response to this private cry of despair, but we are not getting one in the capital consents and the various other policies presented by the Government this evening. The Government tell us that the sale of council houses is part and parcel of their policy of generating capital to meet some of the problems explained here tonight. But COSLA tells us in annex 3 of its brief that it understood that receipts from the sale of council houses would be used from the beginning to augment the capital programme, not to substitute it, but that since the last election the amount of money available for capital expenditure has steadily diminished while council house receipts have risen.

I must tell the Minister and the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that the day of reckoning is coming in respect of council house sales. In Penilee, in my constituency, there is terraced housing, six in a block, in which three or four people have bought their houses. A pensioner couple decided that rents were becoming so high that they might as well get a mortgage. Now they find themselves facing large repair and maintenance bills. They came to me for advice, and I said that I would see about a Government grant but that it could not be guaranteed. To be fair to the district council, it could not guarantee such a grant in the financial year in which the repairs were carried out.

Next, I advised the couple to go to the building society. The difference between what they paid for the house and its capital value now should have allowed an increase in the mortgage to meet this additional expenditure. But the old couple explained to me that that was impossible. They had bought the house in the first place because they lived on a relatively low income and could not afford the rent, so now it was impossible to afford the additional costs of a higher mortgage. So the fabric of this building in Penilee will continually deteriorate, and the same is happening in many other parts of the country.

These proposals, which show a substantial reduction in the resources allocated to Scottish housing, must be judged against the problems. It does not matter whether we use Government, Shelter, or district council statistics; we know that there has been a great increase in homelessness in all parts of Scotland. There is an enormous problem of damp; 234,000 houses in Scotland suffer from it and it is a scourge for the families who have to live with it—80,000 of them in the city of Glasgow.

There is overcrowding and there are too many poor quality houses. I am sick and tired of hearing Conservative Members tell us about the alleged 20,000 empty council properties in Scotland. Would any of us live in those properties? The answer is, of course, no. There is also a lack of specialist housing—sheltered housing for the elderly, housing for the disabled and housing for young people, who are a vulnerable group. Matching the resources allocated to deal with the problem to the problem itself leads to only one conclusion—they are totally inadequate.

I should like to focus on the problems in my constituency. The area known as Corkerhill has a good community council and a good community leader in the shape of Walter Morrison. It is one of the best community councils in Glasgow, often regarded as a thorn in the flesh of the city council, which is what community councils are supposed to be. Corkerhill community council's public meetings are extremely well attended. Articulate and intelligent people gather to try to improve their circumstances. They live in an area of flat-roofed housing, and what they need more than anything else is pitched roofs. There is no money available for them. Now the district council finds it almost impossible to carry out repairs on the flat roofs because as the man walks across them to repair them he causes more damage. Tenants have problems with damp and their children have respiratory illnesses, all because of a lack of capital investment. It has nothing to do with tenure but everything to do with the amount of money available.

Moorpark is the area in Govan where the major drug dealing was done, but by a combination of community pressure and police action they got the major drug baron and the drug problem substantially out of the area. Nevertheless, it has high unemployment, there are many single-parent families, and there is a good deal of poverty. We went along to meet David Conley to argue our case for an improvement in housing because the folk there have no money of their own with which to generate improvement within the area, only to be told that because of the Government's policy there is no prospect of improvement in the current five-year programme and no guarantees for the next five-year programme. How do we stop that community slipping back into its former circumstances? It is, in the end, the Government's responsibility.

Only one conclusion can be drawn from an examination of the documents before the House about the human circumstances that we meet in the streets of Scotland: the Government are a failure, and the sooner they go, the better.

10.1 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): As a new Member, I am absolutely shocked to find that for two thirds of this debate only three or four hon. Members sat on the Government Benches. Is that what the Government of the country think about Scottish public sector housing? Is that the interest that they are willing to give to it, and can the party with the largest number of hon. Members find only three or four to attend the debate? It is utterly disgraceful.

One thing that I have learnt from the debate, however, is that people who live in cardboard boxes in Edinburgh

are overcrowded because they keep their skis in those boxes. We know that they do because they go to the constituency of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) at weekends to ski. He told us this. He also told us that they come to pick berries and that they will not go away. Maybe we shall have to consider issuing visas for Tayside to make sure that they do not stay in his constituency. Does the hon. Member never ask himself why people move around like that? If they were settled in a decent home——

Mr. Bill Walker: I am delighted to tell the hon. Lady why people come to my constituency: it is because it is such a beautiful place. If some come there to ski, it is not surprising.

Perhaps I should remind the hon. Lady that, although Conservative Members from Scotland have attended the debate, a lot of Labour Members from Scotland have not put in an appearance at all.

Mrs. Adams: I visit the hon. Member's constituency, but I do not go to pick berries and I do not have to look for a job or a home there. The difference between Opposition Members and Government Members is that we want everyone to live in decent homes, not just some of the people.

Homelessness in Scotland has risen dramatically under this Government. The present situation is almost comparable with that of 100 years ago, with nearly as many homeless people in this country today as there were then. It is a disgraceful indictment of any Government.

Homelessness affects one's whole way of life. It is not just that a person has no roof over his head or is living under someone else's roof. People may be inadequately housed. In Renfrew district, for example, there are 25,000 people on the waiting list. I am not suggesting that they are all homeless, but they are all inadequately housed. Inadequate housing affects people's lifestyles. Children are not educated properly because often there is no extra room in which they can study. Renfrew has massive overcrowding because it does not have the houses to which to move people. The best will and all the management in the world will not solve that problem. Resources are required.

Conservative Members tell us again and again that the problems are caused by mismanagement and that if we tinker here and there many of them can be solved. They are suggesting a redistribution of poverty, which is the basic reason for our housing problems. That poverty is a result of the Government's economic policy. People who do not have jobs lose their houses and have nowhere to go. The Government have deliberately set about destroying public sector housing. Scotland was an egalitarian society in which most people lived in public sector houses, but the Government told them that that was not a good idea and, as a result, the best public sector housing has been sold. The Government have not made available resources to replace those houses and have not given us the receipts from sales to reinvest in the houses that are left. As a result, those houses have continuously deteriorated.

Conservative Members have spoken about empty council houses. A shell without a roof is not an empty house, it is an empty shell. Of course people will not accept such houses. I certainly would not and I defy any Conservative Member to say that he would. The people who are offered such houses are often those who do not have any resources to spend on them. They are single parents and people on fixed incomes. Some of the homelessness among such people has arisen because benefits are no longer available to some young people. Some households totally depend on state benefits and a young person of 17 who has no training, no job and no income cannot remain in such a household because his family cannot afford to keep him. The only way that he can become entitled to income is to go on to the streets and become homeless. His name will then be placed on the homeless list and he will be allocated a house and be entitled to benefit. The vicious circle continues.

Government policies have caused poverty, and that has created the homelessness which has destroyed Scotland's public sector housing. If the Government can offer no better answer than a massive reduction in the allocation of money, it is time that they moved over and moved off the park.

10.7 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The last time that the Minister was in my constituency he was seen on a penny-farthing bike. At least that bike worked. The miserable pittance that the Minister has offered to solve some of Scotland's housing problems will lead to him being called the Minister of rent-a-tent. The Minister's predecessors over the past 10 years have been weak-willed wafflers.

Scotland's housing crisis breaks my heart, and I am sure that it breaks the heart of many hon. Members who receive letters on the subject. I should like to read one which speaks clearly about the problem being created by the Government. It states:

"Dear Mr. Graham,

I am desperately in need of your help. Due to a combination of low-paid work and high interest rates I have been forced to sell my house. After getting into difficulties with the payments I tried to catch up with my arrears, but this eventually became impossible and the building society advised me to sell before they took action themselves, this has left both my wife and I at our wits end—in fact my wife is on medication from her doctor.

In order to try to save our home my wife secured a part-time job in Linwood. However, if we were forced to leave Linwood she would have to give this job up because the hours fit in with my children's school hours."

The local authority has been nearly broken by the Government's mismanagement in failing to house people in such circumstances.

I have another letter which I am sure will break the hearts of many hon. Members on this side of the House. I hope that the Government will take some action because they have the power to do so. This is a letter from a sergeant in the Army for whom I have tried to secure a house. After 24 years in the Army, having given excellent service, he wishes to come to my area. He wants to stay with his family, with his mother and brother, and with people in the community. We cannot give him a house. The local authority has only a few left and there is not a big turnover in housing. But we have Scottish Homes, over which the Minister has absolute control. Did Scottish Homes respond to this man's need? No, it did not. The Under-Secretary of State should get the rules and regulations changed to allow this man to be housed by Scottish Homes or to allow the man even to purchase a Scottish home. The Government have denied him that right, too. The Minister should hang his head in shame if he cannot help a loyal service man with 24 years' service.

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

I have another letter to which I wish to draw attention although I shall not read it to the House. It is from an invalid, a woman suffering very serious health problems. She lives in another part of the country and wishes to come to our area. She has tried everything, but has been unsuccessful because the council does not have all the houses in its control. Our area is very much dominated by the houses owned by Scottish Homes. As hon. Members will know, Scottish Homes has become the biggest estate agency in Scotland. It does not contribute at all to solving the problem of homelessness or to assisting the people of Renfrewshire who wish to stay in the area.

I also instance in this debate the massive escalation in rents in my constituency. I believe that the Government are perpetrating mindless mugging. One has only to consider the escalating poll tax, increasing fuel costs, and the ongoing problem of homelessness, all of which have been created by this Government because of the economic position that they have taken in past years involving high interest rates. We know that factories in our area are closing practically every day of the week, yet the Government still continue their mad housing policy.

All hon. Members could quote cases such as I have instanced tonight. Scottish Office Ministers should argue the case, in Cabinet or wherever, to obtain sufficient money to build new houses. We desperately need new houses in Scotland. We also need money to renovate damp houses—houses in which people cannot live because the Government have constantly curbed funds for local government which wishes to improve such houses. I put it to the Minister that we also need sheltered housing accommodation. We need supported accommodation for some of the people whom this Government have thrown on the street. I refer to the mentally handicapped and mentally ill who are walking the streets in my area, in Glasgow and in other cities. The Minister has a duty and a responsibility to fight for the people of Scotland. There is a crisis and we need housing. Perhaps the Minister needs a pair of glasses. I shall give him some and then take him to see the problem.

It has been said tonight that the berry pickers are looking for houses. There are more than just berry pickers looking for houses—loyal service men will come home having fought a war for this country, and they will expect homes fit to live in.

10.16 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster: (Paisley, South): As a new Member, this is my first opportunity to participate in a Scottish housing debate. I read the orders carefully, and nowhere do they refer to tenants, those who depend on public sector housing. There are statistics—columns and columns of numbers—but there is nothing about those who depend on public sector housing.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) referred to the link between bad housing and bad health. I am sorry that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) has left the Chamber. He referred to the past, when councils ripped people away from the hearts of the cities. I had the pleasure today of welcoming my father as a visitor to the House. He was brought up in the constituency that I represent, in the town of Johnstone. His experience was of 100 people—24 families—sharing four outside toilets. Those are the sort of conditions that people were ripped away from in the hearts of the cities. Perhaps someone in the position of the hon. and learned Gentleman can afford that sort of nostalgia, but it is not something to which the people of Scotland want to return. It put my father in a sanatorium, and it is now endangering young children who suffer from asthma and bronchial complaints. That is the reality of Scottish housing and the lack of proper investment.

I am glad that my hon. Friends have tried to concentrate the debate on the fundamental right to shelter. They have concentrated on homes rather than dwelling units and put people before statistics. Some hon. Members have accused the Minister of indifference to the problems of Scottish housing. It is far worse than indifference. During the past decade, there has been the systematic and calculated destruction of a public sector housing system that has taken a century to build. The Government have tried to destroy it in a decade. Hon. Members have referred to the excellent briefing paper prepared by COSLA. Whatever is said, we cannot disguise the fact that during that decade £1,500 million of direct Government support has been taken away from Scottish local government and it cannot be denied that £100 million more is being taken away this year.

In my maiden speech on 12 December 1989, I said that if the housing support grant for Renfrew district council was restored to its 1979 level, when the Government took office, it would be 34 per cent.—another £11 million for the council. That money would not only improve housing and reduce homelessness, but it would help the local economy because that council expenditure would generate local jobs. That would improve the economic position of the whole area.

During the decade that the Government have had responsibility for Scottish housing, council house tenants have become the most heavily taxed people. Housing support grant has been lost, as has the general fund contribution, yet that is the part that society, the community as a whole, puts into public sector housing. Interest rates and inflation have risen, and that has also had an impact on local authority budgets. I believe that there is something more sinister. What has happened? In the last decade the best public sector houses have been sold leaving the worst and fewer tenants to finance them. That is the reality.

The Government have offered a carrot-and-stick solution: they have offered the carrot of discounts to those people wishing to purchase public sector houses, but they have stood behind them with a stick hitting them to ensure that we do not invest in public sector housing. If a person does not like the conditions in which he is living, if he wishes to improve his lot, and if he wants a wind and watertight house, he will need to purchase that house. That is what has happened to many people.

In conclusion, I draw attention to the plight of many young couples who, because of the problems facing Scottish housing, have been unable to obtain a public sector house. This has often forced them to enter into mortgages which they cannot afford. One of the sad housing statistics is that of the number of young people who are having their homes repossessed because they can no longer keep up the mortgage payments. This is one of the problems affecting constituencies such as mine. I invite the Minister to come, for example, to the Foxbar area where almost half the houses are uninhabitable and where

people who are living there are living in damp, deplorable conditions. These people had plenty of promises and statements in the Paisley, South by-election campaign, but they do not want sympathetic noises; they want action. The Government should give it to them.

10.21 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Understandably, at present people's minds are elsewhere, but it is business as usual for many people in this country. It is business as usual for the homeless young people who are sleeping in cardboard city on the Embankment, not far from this place; it is business as usual for homeless people in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland.

A few minutes ago my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) made a light-hearted and humorous comment about Edinburgh. I think that some people forget that, although Edinburgh is without doubt one of the most prosperous cities in Europe, at the same time it has formidable problems, particularly in housing. Just before Christmas a great deal of attention was focused on the plight of homeless people in Edinburgh. On the same day that the Prime Minister announced extra money for the homeless in London I asked the Scottish Office what it intended to do for Scotland. The answer was "nothing". Yet within a few hours the Scottish Office had cobbled together an announcement that £2 million had been allocated to Scotland.

We found out what that £2 million was. It was not additional money being made available to Scotland; it was simply borrowing consent for the four major cities of Scotland. For every penny those cities borrow, the interest has to be paid, not by the taxpayers as a whole, but by council house tenants. Therefore, existing council house tenants in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen will have to shoulder the burden of providing what little extra help there is for homeless people. Of the £2 million being made available, Edinburgh has put in for £1 million. Perhaps that is ambitious, because it is half the programme. If the city gets that £1 million it will provide just 16 beds—16 beds in a city with more than 6,000 homeless people. Half of those 6,000 are in priority need. It is estimated—and it can only be an estimate—that 200 people in Edinburgh sleep rough every night, in graveyards, in the streets, anywhere they can find, every night of the year. There has been a 200 per cent. increase in the homeless rate for 16 to 24-year-olds, young people who are increasingly at risk from violence and sexual abuse. Many of them turn to prostitution, male and female. It is one of the scars of Scotland that in Edinburgh, which is one of the most prosperous cities in Europe, there is this ugly side to the city of people who are in desperate need. The Government are not willing to face the real problem.

The Minister will say that there are empty houses in Edinburgh. Yes, there are. Edinburgh district council is doing all it can to speed up its allocation policies. But there are other problems. Some houses need repair before they can be let and, as other hon. Members have said, people understandably will not take houses that are not fit for reletting.

Another problem is that now that there is no single payment from the Department of Social Security people who are offered houses might not be able to furnish them. Community care grants are being limited and cut in Edinburgh as in other areas. Yet until this year Edinburgh received no housing support grant. This year it received a mere £500,000.

In addition to that problem, the record of Scottish Homes in Edinburgh is abysmal. Edinburgh has 26 per cent. public sector housing, but this year it received only £10·1 million from Scottish Homes, £9 million of which was for committed projects, so only £1 million was available in new money. Yet Glasgow, which has 60 per cent. public sector housing and a population only twice that of Edinburgh, had five times the amount that Edinburgh had from public funds.

I do not grudge Glasgow a single penny of that, but why on earth should Edinburgh lose out so badly? The Government say that that is nothing to do with them and that it is a matter for the quango that they appointed—Scottish Homes. But the lack of public sector rented accommodation means that pensioners who want to live in sheltered housing and in the centre of the city, rather than be shifted out to the schemes in the periphery, cannot do so, young couples who could never afford to buy have no accommodation to choose from, and a growing number of single people have nowhere to go at all.

The Government's policy is all over the place. It is clear that they want to reduce the number of people who live in public sector housing, but when will they face up to the fact that, even if they reduce the number of people in public sector housing, a large core of people will still have no choice other than to rely on public sector housing? They include pensioners and young people who do not have the spending power to buy their own houses.

What will happen to that large core of people for whom buying a house is simply not an option? The Government do not seem to have an answer. Certainly the chairman of Scottish Homes does not have an answer. He refers to something called social housing, as one might expect from a retired diplomat. He has no idea of the problems facing the people in Scotland, and in Edinburgh in particular.

Too often people look at Edinburgh—at Princes street, the castle and the Georgian new town—and they think that it is a prosperous city. Some of it is, but behind those Georgian facades and beside some of those magnificent buildings that are the envy of many tourists who visit Edinburgh there is much hardship and grief. That may give rise to laughter among Scottish Office Ministers, but the time has come when the Scottish Office should stop acting as simply a branch office of the Department of the Environment and realise that the urgent and ugly problems in Edinburgh need to be tackled now.

10.27 pm

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): I have little time left, so I shall make only two important points.

Every hon. Member who has spoken tonight has pointed out the serious housing problem facing Scotland. More than 90 per cent. of those people who contact us at our surgeries, whether of a Labour or a Conservative Member of Parliament, have housing problems. Yet, as councillors keep telling us, we as Members of Parliament have nothing to do with housing. Such is the crisis that the Scottish people are facing that, as a last resort, they have to go to their Members of Parliament.

The orders are another attempt by the Government to hammer public sector housing and council tenants. During the past 10 years in Scotland public sector housing finance

[Mr. David Lambie]

has dropped by £1·5 billion. I would accept that if the Government were trying to reduce the amount of money given to housing in the United Kingdom budget, but they are not doing that. During the past 10 years, when they have hammered council houses and taken away £1·5 billion in resources for council houses, they have increased tenfold the amount of money being given to the owner-occupier and the private sector. At the same time they have increased substantially the amount given to owner-occupiers.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that mortgage tax relief was not really a subsidy. I remind the hon. Gentleman and all his Tory colleagues that the Adam Smith Institute—the think tank of the Tory party—said that the party and the Government had no right to subsidise owner-occupiers. In fact, a recent Chancellor considered doing away with mortgage tax relief. Why do not the Tories carry out Tory party policy in the case of owner-occupiers? They do so in the case of council tenants. Let us have an even playing field, rather than continual attacks on council tenants.

Lastly, I want to raise a problem from my constituency. The biggest part of the constituency is the new town of Irvine, where there is a tremendous housing problem. The Government have brought people into the new town. Those people have been provided with jobs, and good amenities, including very modern houses. But the urban development corporation is not being provided with money to supply houses for second-generation families. I want the Minister to ask his colleague who is responsible for new towns to look into the problem and see that money is provided for this purpose.

On a previous occasion I requested a meeting with the Minister to discuss the problem. That was after his refusal and the refusal of his officials to meet representatives of Cunninghame district council. In a communication to the council the Minister said that the development corporation was not to be given any money to provide houses for second-generation families, as that was the job of the council. Again, under these orders, he has the cheek to give Cunninghame district council not one penny towards housing support grant—not a penny for houses for second-generation families.

The Minister is quite a decent chap. Let him ensure that Cunninghame district council is given the money to provide houses for second-generation families in Irvine new town.

10.34 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This has been a very useful and varied debate. I shall look into the point that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) made. Some time ago, in a similar debate, he mentioned the Adam Smith Institute's recommendation that there should be a rents-to-mortgages scheme—something for which the hon. Gentleman has called. We are doing precisely that—aiming for a wholly new market. The recommendation will be followed through in due course, and I shall be meeting the housing committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the subject.

Mr. Lambie: That is not what I called for. I called for the abolition of mortgage tax relief, which is Tory party policy as recommended by the Adam Smith Institute.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman has made that point twice in our debates, once in the Scottish Grand Committee and once on the Floor of the House when he addressed my right hon. and learned Friend the previous Secretary of State for Scotland. He may have made the point as a joke, but he made it very effectively and we are acting on it.

In response to the hon. Members for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), I must point out that the HRA provisional allocation for Renfrew district council amounts to more than £17 million, which represents £535 per council house. That is an increase over the provision for 1990-91 of £528 per house. We are taking the urban partnership initiative very seriously and we have already made available £1·257 million extra for innovative housing.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) referred to 1265 Pollokshaws road. Glasgow district council recently stated that it is willing to make grants available for improvements to those properties. I hope that that will be of considerable assistance to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. However, the hon. Gentleman should not underestimate the significance of the assistance that Glasgow district council can provide.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) referred to someone buying a flat in a council house block of four and asked whether that person would be eligible for an improvement grant. That may be at the discretion of the local authority depending, on how recently the house was—*[Interruption.]*

I want now to consider the funding for Glasgow to which reference was made by the hon. Members for Springburn, for Pollok and for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). As the largest housing authority in Scotland, Glasgow continues to receive the largest share of resources available—more than 20 per cent. of the provision. For 1991-92 the council's HRA allocation of £92 million includes £4·6 million to honour commitments given for innovative housing in Castlemilk in Cathcart. Excluding that earmarked provision, the allocation gives the council an allocation of £616 per council house which is considerably above the Scottish average of £559. The council's net allocation of £60 million is 11 per cent. higher than the corresponding allocation for 1990-91. That increase, together with the resources of around £16 million which the council expects to draw down from its covenant scheme, should enable it to sustain its substantial capital programme. With regard to non-HRA moneys, the allocation of £23 million should support activity.

Mr. Dunnachie: What?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman should not belittle that £23 million and the point that he made about his constituents could be covered there.

Glasgow does particularly well with regard to housing support grant. It received more than £22 million, which is more than 40 per cent. of the total payable in Scotland, while Glasgow has less than 20 per cent. of the council housing stock.

We would not have guessed from the debate that Edinburgh had just received an allocation of more than £8

million to deal with the pre-1984 tenement block applications. That sum should finish the exercise and that fact should be acknowledged.

Mr. Maxton: Following the Minister's remarks about housing support grant for Glasgow, will he make it clear that he is cutting Glasgow's housing support grant by very nearly £2 million?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman must take account of what I said about interest rates, which have an effect on the total sum. I appreciate that Glasgow's rents have increased significantly in recent years and, although I accept that part of that increase is attributable to reductions in general fund contributions, the major reason is that the council chose to enter into large covenant agreements. It knew before doing so that those agreements were not eligible for housing support grant. However, Edinburgh has a considerably higher allocation than the Scottish average of £559. It receives £685 per house, and the public sector contribution in Edinburgh's capital programme will rise from more than £6 million to £12 million in 1991-92, a substantial increase of more than 112 per cent. It is remarkable that Edinburgh has a £2 million surplus on its revenue account which it could use if it wished. That, of course, is a matter for Edinburgh. No doubt the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will know why it has not been used.

Mr. Darling: As it happens, I raised that very point with some senior officials from Edinburgh district council, and the Minister knows the answer. Does he accept that the £8 million ceiling that has been allocated for the housing repair grant scheme deals only with pre-1984 applications and that several thousand people are still waiting for allocations after that time? Will the Minister also consider my point about Scottish Homes? Why is it that Glasgow, with twice the population of Edinburgh, gets five times as much as Edinburgh does for the traditional rented sector in the housing association programme?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Glasgow gets a larger share because needs in Glasgow are greater than those in Edinburgh. No fair-minded Scottish Member of Parliament would deny that. Edinburgh has problems, and rooflessness, which is not the same as homelessness, is a particular one. I take seriously the representations that have been made. There is no simple solution. The programmes that are being put forward will be carefully considered. We hope to respond as soon as possible. We are making a non-housing revenue account allocation of more than £18 million to Edinburgh, so it is doing very well.

Mrs. Fyfe: I address my remarks to my colleagues. Are we not sick of statistics being bandied year after year? Ministers attempt to deceive the public by talking of vast amounts of capital allocation which we know have already been spent. They do not talk about the real figures that matter. How long must people languish in houses that are totally unfit to live in? *[Interruption.]* We want to know for how long our constituents will have to live in deplorable housing conditions. We have had the tenants' campaign—*[Interruption.]*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have visited the hon. Lady's constituency several times. Progress is being made, not least by Queens Cross housing association, which is effectively in her constituency. Scottish Homes, through the housing associations and the housing association movement before Scottish Homes was set up, spent nearly £0·5 billion in Glasgow.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) made an important point about the pool rate of interest used in the housing support grant calculations. If the hon. Gentleman cares to examine the record of previous years, he will note that the pool rate has proved to be a reasonably accurate guide to the interest payable by each authority. I know of no reason why the pool rate should suddenly be regarded as inaccurate. However, as I said earlier, I should be happy for the use of the pool rate to be discussed further with the convention. I mentioned also that the authorities in the highlands and islands are major beneficiaries of housing support grant. Next year, Ross and Cromarty will receive a subsidy of more than £700 per council tenant. Inverness receives £267 per tenant and Lochaber receives £977 per tenant. On average in Scotland, the subsidy amounts to only £76 per tenant. Those areas in the highlands are doing better than the Scottish average, which is only fair when all circumstances are taken into account.

We have made a supplementary allocation today to Ettrick and Lauderdale, to Roxburgh, Stirling, Kincardine and Deeside, to Western Isles and to Hamilton of £825,000. Of course, final allocations remain to be paid. We shall take into account the points that have been made.

On capital investment in relation to resources generally for Scotland, under the Labour Government there was a reduction in real terms of 36 per cent. However, there has been an increase in real terms of 13 per cent. since 1978-79. Indeed, the provisional housing capital allocation fell by £520 million.

The Government have a good record. Through Scottish Homes we have created a powerful housing development agency funded with more than £1,140 million. Since we came to power we have done a great deal to increase the number of amenity dwellings. The number has more than quadrupled. We have increased the number of sheltered dwellings to over 28,600. We have responded to the aspirations of the Scottish people by introducing not only the right to buy but soon the rents-to-mortgages scheme which will be accessible to 370,000 tenants—even if the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) regrets that he asked for the scheme some years ago. I shall be happy to remind him of what he said in *Hansard.*

We have demonstrated our determination to provide the resources and guidance needed to enable local authorities to deal efficiently and sensitively with the difficult problem of homelessness. It is often forgotten that since 1979 some 220,000 houses have been built in Scotland. Virtually 60,000 of those were built by the public sector and housing associations.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have only one minute to go.

The orders provide a fair and reasonable subsidy package for 1991-92 and I am glad to recommend that the House approve them.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 150.

Division No. 46] **[10.46 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gregory, Conal
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livsey, Richard
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John

McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

It being more than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the previous motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker *proceeded, pursuant to Order [18 January], to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the other motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Lang.*

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Representation of the People [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Representation of the People Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums to be paid out of that Fund under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Maples.]*

10.59 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I hope that the Minister can give the House an explanation. It is worth making the request, because the Bill was taken in a Second Reading Committee on 18 December. The circumstances arose apparently because of advice from Mr. Speaker's Counsel. It was found that the maximum expenditure laid down was ultra vires. I cannot recall accurately the circumstances, but the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments discussed at least one order relating to returning officers' expenses. The legislation may result from that.

All I seek is an assurance from the Minister that the orders that the Treasury will introduce under the powers granted by the Bill, which will cover the expenditure of returning officers, will represent expenditure previously carried out under different legislation, and that there will not be reductions in the amount of expenditure granted by the Treasury to returning officers.

I mention this because there is an apparent conflict. The explanatory and financial memorandum on the Bill says: "there will, however, be no net increase in expenditure attributable to the Bill."

Yet the money resolution says that it will cover

"any increase attributable to the Act in the sums to be paid out of that Fund under any other enactment."

The fund referred to is the Consolidated Fund.

I do not object to an increase in expenditure because, like all hon. Members, I think that money for returning officers is extremely well spent, especially when it has such good results as in Bradford, South where we tripled our majority. Of course, we want much better results at the next general election. We want to make sure that returning officers have adequate facilities to count the massive votes that will be cast for Labour. I should like to hear the Minister's comments.

11.2 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): The hon. Gentleman is right in his description of what gave rise to the Bill. It was found that under the Representation of the People Act 1983, which says that the Treasury shall prescribe maximum charges, we had difficulty in prescribing maximum charges because what may be an appropriate maximum for one constituency is not necessarily appropriate for another. Therefore, we were faced with setting amounts that would be too low for some, or so high that they might encourage returning officers to spend up to the prescribed amount. The regulations prescribed that in certain cases there would be specific monetary amounts and in other cases what would be recoverable would be actual and necessary costs. It was that which was found by the Speaker's Counsel to be ultra vires. We were advised that it did not fit within the power to prescribe maximum charges.

The most recent regulations use the phrase "authorised maximum" in cases where it is difficult to prescribe a

[Mr. John Maples]

maximum. That is defined as being the amount that was spent at the 1987 election, with an uplift of 30 per cent. The problem is that that cannot continue to work past the next boundary reorganisation. It would be difficult to make it work at the next general election when the Milton Keynes constituency is to be split into two.

We had to face the problem. We have dealt with it by putting the law in the position which everyone thought that it was in before, which is that returning officers will be able to recover all expenses that were reasonably incurred, as long as those expenses are under a heading that is prescribed in the regulations. Again, where it is appropriate, the regulations will prescribe maximum payments. In that respect, the Bill will put the law back into the position that we all understood it to be in before.

The reference in the money resolution is to a slightly different problem. Sometimes expenses incurred by returning officers quite properly exceeded the maximums laid down in law. We are advised that under the 1983 Act it was possibly not legal to pay more than the amounts of money prescribed, although in some cases payments were made. Most of the payments under the original Act and under this Bill are made out of the Consolidated Fund, but when extra-statutory payments were made to reimburse returning officers for amounts over and above authorised expenses, they were paid out of voted money. It is that with which the money resolution deals; the hon. Gentleman will find that it refers to section 29(4A) of the 1983 Act.

I hope that I have answered the questions asked by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Question put and agreed to.

The Press (Conduct)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

11.5 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): All hon. Members are aware that parts of the British press have behaved so badly in recent years that Bills supporting the right to reply and the legal right to privacy have gained great favour in the House. As a result, the Government set up the Calcutt committee, which recommended that the Press Council should be replaced by the strengthened Press Complaints Commission. Both the Calcutt report and the Government have said that, if self-regulation does not work, it should be replaced by a statutory tribunal, with statutory powers, implementing a statutory code of practice.

I should like to share with the House my experience of how these new arrangements are working. Members will be aware that Patricia Chapman, the editor of the *News of the World,* is a member of the new commission—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."]—established, I understand, on 1 January. I want to tell the House what she has been trying to do to me.

First, I set out the background. On 12 March 1986 I introduced a Bill to remove from our newspapers pornographic pictures of women. I believe that such pictures degrade women and newspapers and set the tone for some of the most shameful and objectionable parts of our newspaper tradition. The Murdoch tabloids did not like the Bill. That resulted in a campaign of vilification against me in *The Sun*. Stories appeared about "Crazy Clare", "Killjoy Clare", and

"20 things you ought to know about Crazy Clare",

accompanied by a succession of ugly photographs and invitations to readers to write in, freepost, to "stop crazy Clare" and to send for car stickers to "stop crazy Clare". The paper sought to portray me as an ugly harridan, a killjoy woman.

After some years the campaign fizzled out. Action then moved to the *News of the World, The Sun's* sister paper. The direction of the campaign changed, too. On 10 December 1990, a story appeared headlined

"Labour's lovelies—Ad in Clare's paper that thrilled Grandad"

—fine English, Members will agree. The story was accompanied by an extremely ugly photo of me and by two large old-fashioned pornographic photos. The story was that *Tribune,* a weekly Labour party paper, had carried a small advertisement suggesting that people

"send for grandad's naughty pictures".

That was all. The story could have been aimed at any member of the Labour party, including its leader.

I saw the story, did not like it but knew that it was ridiculous, and did nothing. Then, on 28 October 1990, a second story appeared, with another ugly photo of course. The headline was:

"Anti-porn MP's ex-aide quizzed over porn!"

The article claimed that a woman who had worked for me on my "page three" Bill had been raided in connection with pornographic videos. That was a lie. The paper did not check the facts.

Instead, I received a phone call on the Saturday morning before the paper appeared, just before leaving for my constituency advice bureau. The caller was a woman who said that she was a freelance reporter who needed my

help. She said that I was her last chance. She wanted, she said, to contact someone who had worked for me and my husband and she asked if I could possibly help. I said that I was sorry but that I had not seen the person for years and had no idea where she was. The caller then said that a woman had been raided in connection with pornographic videos. I said that I knew nothing about that. She then asked what I thought about it. I said that this was getting silly, that I did not understand what she was doing, that she had asked my help but I could not give it and that I had to go to my advice bureau. I then put the phone down.

The story appeared and quoted me as saying

"I haven't seen her for some time. I don't know where she is living."

It went on to say:

"Then she slammed the phone down."

Note the change in my words from "haven't seen her for years" to "haven't seen her for some time", a necessary distortion of the very little that I had said, not in answer, of course, to the basic question that needed to be asked, so that an untrue story could be carried.

The woman concerned had years ago worked for a number of hon. Members. She had worked for my husband for a time before he lost his seat in the 1983 election. I was elected and I took her on to prevent her from being unemployed, but it did not work out, she left of her own volition after a short time and I have not seen or heard of her since. If the *News of the World* had bothered to ask, I could have told it so. It did not, because it would have ruined its false story.

I decided then—at the end of October—that this was too much. Two stories had appeared, in effect suggesting that I was a pornographer and therefore a hypocrite. The direction of the smear had changed—no longer "Killjoy Clare" but "Pornographer Clare". I decided that I should take action this time. I complained to the Press Council, I wrote to the paper, and I made an official complaint to the police.

I made the complaint to the police because the source of the story was a letter found by the police during the course of a raid, quite a proper raid—I do not know much about it but I assume that it was a proper raid—on this woman. The letter dated back to the period when she had worked for me and was completely unconnected with the criminal investigation, but some police officer had passed it to the *News of the World*.

I received a kind and helpful reply from Commander Richard Monk, head of the obscene publications squad at New Scotland Yard:

"Although we have not met, I know of your strong support for the work we do against pornography and especially child sex abuse, and I was sorry to receive it."

He said that he had put the investigation in hand and went on:

"Meanwhile I can only offer my annoyance that a newspaper has treated such a piece of irrelevant information in such an unfair way and my own keen interest to have the source of the information identified if at all possible."

I also got a small apology in the *News of the World*, with a less ugly photo than usual.

But now, after that, it seems that the *News of the World* is angry with me for complaining, and wishes to smear and belittle me further. On 10 January 1991 I got a phone call from a very good friend in Leeds. She had been contacted by a man whom I had married when I was 18, when we were both students. The marriage ended 20 years ago. John Chapman—I suggest that all hon. Members will remember the name; I have never met this man but he is the one who goes for the grot, and I presume that if someone gets in a room with him that person is in danger of catching a disease associated with sewage—of the *News of the World* had been to see my ex-husband, asking about our marriage, how it had ended and what I had done afterwards. Questions had been asked with horrendous, deeply hurtful, unbelievable and completely false implications. Had he any "naughty" photographs of me? Photos of me in a nightdress were discussed. Five thousand pounds was firmly offered and the possibility of as much as £20,000 was discussed. I know the photos. They are not improper, but I would find it terrible to see them published in the *News of the World*.

As hon. Members may imagine, I was pretty upset by this. I was told that the story was to be run the following Sunday. I lived in horror until then. Then they suggested the next Sunday—and so it goes on. I prefer to tell my story here tonight.

I should also explain that I have been aware for some time that members or ex-members of the West Midlands serious crimes squad have been pushing a story about me to the press. I know this because a number of journalists have telephoned me to warn me. They said that it was clearly not a story but was an attempted smear. They had no intention of touching it but thought that I ought to know. I wondered what I should do about it, but decided that there was nothing that I could do and that I should rely on the decency of journalists and their code of conduct —I reckoned without Patricia Chapman, the *News of the World* and Mr. John Chapman.

The House may be aware that in an Adjournment debate on 25 January 1989 I raised the case of my constituent Paul Dandy who had been charged by the serious crimes squad with a very serious offence. He had spent nearly a year in prison and in that time had attempted to commit suicide. The case against him had collapsed in court when it had been demonstrated forensically that his confession, on which the charge relied, had been fabricated: his statement to the police had been rewritten and the confession inserted. His lawyers contacted me because they were dissatisfied at the way in which his complaint against the police had been handled. They also put me in touch with other lawyers who provided evidence of similar malpractice in other cases. They all told me that such malpractice was widespread in the West Midlands serious crimes squad. I thought that I should bring such a serious matter to the attention of the House.

My speech received a good deal of coverage and later, after other cases had collapsed in court, the squad was disbanded, a major investigation is taking place into the work of the squad, and a number of other cases are being taken back to court and men who were wrongly convicted released from prison. What I said in my Adjournment debate has proved to be true, and I invite hon. Members to read the debate.

I should make it clear, because this is part of the *News of the World* attempted smear, that my action to deal with problems in one small unit of the West Midlands police force does not interfere with the very good relationship that I have with my local police force, which is very helpful when I approach it on behalf of constituents. In Ladywood, as elsewhere, we need the protection of our

[Ms. Clare Short]

local police. They and I have worked together on many cases and issues in order to ensure that local people are properly protected from crime.

Following my speech, various people in Birmingham, in shops and in the street, stopped me to say that they thought that I was right to say what I said. More than one said that I should be careful and to drive and go carefully in case the squad tried to get back at me. I was grateful for their concern but did not believe that such a thing would happen. I was wrong.

The story that ex-squad officers have been pushing to the press and in which the *News of the World* is primarily interested concerns a close friendship that I had with a man in the early 1970s when I was working in the Home Office and was positively vetted by the British security services. The man concerned was Afro-Caribbean. That may seem terrible to the *News of the World* and to ex-members of the serious crimes squad, but I should tell them that I grew up in Handsworth and that 40 per cent. of my constituents are Afro-Caribbean or Asian. Throughout my life large numbers of my friends have been black. I consider that to be good and a good part of my life and not a matter for a smear in the *News of the World.*

The man concerned lived in my house in Birmingham for some years. That may seem steamy to the *News of the World,* but in that house also lived two of my sisters, one of my brothers, a Chilean refugee couple, an American writer, some architecture students and others. They did not all live there at the same time. It was not that big a house, but it was a happy house and we were all good friends.

The man in whom the *News of the World* is interested later went to live abroad and, of course, I completely lost touch with him. In 1979 he apparently came back to Birmingham and was killed in a shooting in a car. The West Midlands police and, I now realise, the serious crimes squad investigated the murder. Officers came to see me when I was at work as the director of Youthaid in 1979. I told them all that I knew, and that was the end of it. They also called on everyone who knew him. One of my brothers whom they also went to see said that the police commented on the large number of nice friends that he had.

Many people can testify to this man's character at that time. He was known and liked by many good people. The *News of the World* has suggested in a letter to my solicitor that this man had some very serious previous convictions. I do not know whether that is true. I am tempted to say that, coming from the *News of the World,* it probably is not, but perhaps it is. I assume that everyone can now see the sort of story that the *News of the World* plans to write and the new direction of the smear that it wishes to throw at me. I can only say that neither I nor any of that man's other friends was aware of such convictions or know the reasons for his death. He is not alive to answer for himself, and I understand that the person who killed him has never been found.

My husband of 25 years ago was at first intrigued by the *News of the World* approach and played it along a little. He was kind enough afterwards to contact me and give me a full account of everything that was said. I know that my ex-husband now feels deeply aggrieved by what took place. He believes that the conversation was tape recorded, although he insisted that it be confidential. He now understands that the *News of the World* was using him to get at me. He feels aggrieved that his privacy was so seriously invaded because, in order to use him to get at me, the newspaper had quite improperly gone through all sorts of private details of his life.

My solicitor has complained to the *News of the World* about the offer of money for photographs and about some of the newspaper's most awful questions. The *News of the World* has denied both matters. I have to say, "They would, wouldn't they?" It is quite impossible for any reasonable person who hears the whole story to believe the *News of the World* denial, but the editor of the *News of the World* has to pretend, because of her place on the Press Complaints Commission, that the paper did not do such things.

I should like to mention one other matter about my life. I do not want to talk in the House about my personal life, but as the *News of the World* appears to be planning to print a distorted account of my whole life, I prefer to tell the House the truth.

Many Members of this House remember with affection my husband Alex Lyon. They often send good wishes to him through me. Some hon. Members know that he is terribly ill and that I am doing my best to look after him as well as do my job as a Member of Parliament. I think, although I cannot be certain because he cannot explain things clearly to me, that the *News of the World* has been to see him. He kept talking about some man who had called. I suspect, but I may be wrong, that it was the *News of the World.*

I must ask the *News of the World* not to seek to smear and belittle me. I also ask, as strongly as I can, that it does not seek to belittle my husband—it would not be difficult to do so in view of the condition that he is in. It would be deeply unfair and wrong to use him and his illness to get at me.

It appears that the *News of the World* has crawled over the whole of my adult life. I left home when I was 17 to go to university. I met and married my philosophy student husband. In the early 1970s I worked in the Home Office —that is the period in which the *News of the World* is most interested—and in the late 1970s I became involved with and married Alex Lyon. That brings the *News of the World* completely up to date.

The question is, why is the *News of the World* so interested in me? Why has it spent so much time trailing through my life? The answer is not just that it wants to smear and belittle me for the titillation of their readers; the real answer is political. Two motives come together—disgruntled ex-officers of the West Midlands serious crimes squad want to get at me, and the Murdoch tabloids hate me because I have said that they should not carry porn in their papers.

For those to whom this has not yet happened, I should like to warn hon. Members and the public that to have one's life crawled over by the *News of the World* is an extremely unpleasant experience. For the past two weeks I have been haunted by the Gulf and by the *News of the World*—the sublime to the ridiculous. I do not think that I should be distracted from my work in this House by that newspaper's squalid activities.

I wish to warn every Member of this House of the serious implications. If any one of them steps outside the political space allowed to them by the tabloid press, it can do it to them. It is a very serious matter, and I think that the Privileges Committee should consider it. After all, I am

not the only one. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) dared to stand against the former Prime Minister, and it did it to him. The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) dared to say that it was time for the former Prime Minister to retire, and it did it to him. The hon. Members for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) dared to support the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in the Tory leadership battle, and it did it to them. There are probably others, but I do not read those newspapers.

Every Member of Parliament can be done over. Please do not think that one can escape because there is nothing to hide in one's life. Those newspapers can make the events of any ordinary life like mine seem sordid and squalid. It is a question of privacy, but it is also a very serious question of politics and democracy that should concern us all.

My conclusions—and I am sorry that I have taken so long—are that, first, hon. Members must take the issue seriously. It is me today, it will be one of them tomorrow. It involves the misuse of press power to prevent us from properly doing our job as Members of Parliament. Secondly, I say to my fellow citizens in the country, please do not think that this is a matter just for Members of Parliament; the newspapers can do it to anybody. If, for any reason, a member of a family comes to public attention, they will crawl over his or her life, distort the truth and hurt that person—who will not have the platform that I have to answer back. As we know, the newspapers are currently abusing even the families of people who have been lost in the Gulf.

Thirdly, I call for legislation as a remedy. My solicitor —and I would like to say how enormously grateful I am to him for his help through this time—tells me that I could apply for an injunction to stop the *News of the World*, or sue it for defamation afterwards. I am better off than most of my fellow citizens, but I cannot possibly afford an injunction. I am not interested in money after I have been smeared and belittled. As long as I can pay my bills at the end of the week and care for those whom I have to care for, I am not interested in money. We need proper, cheap, efficient remedies to prevent what has happened. I note that the preventative hotline recommended by the Calcutt report has not yet been set up—otherwise I would have used it—and the Library tells me that that is now unlikely.

Lastly, and extremely importantly, I call for the sacking of the editor of the *News of the World* from the Press Complaints Commission. We cannot take self-regulation seriously for a minute when a person who organises events such as those that I have described is supposed to help to curb the excesses of the press.

I intend to ask the Privileges Committee to consider my case as I am being attacked for doing two things I did in this House as part of my life as a Member of Parliament. I shall complain also to the Press Complaints Commission and to the chief constable of the west midlands. I hope that he will be as helpful as Commander Monk. It is, after all, the same thing—the misuse by some police officers and the *News of the World* of irrelevant information obtained during a criminal investigation.

A healthy democracy needs a healthy press, and we do not have that in Britain. I believe that we should get on and legislate to improve the standards of our press.

11.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): Having listened carefully to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), I can fully understand her feelings about the inquiries which she has reason to believe a Sunday newspaper and other journals—I believe that she referred to other sections of the press—are making about her personal life and relationships going back many years. Judging by what she says she has been told about the questions and the assumptions, and the assertions that lie behind them, I can readily understand why she is distressed and angered. I understand her reaction to the other unfriendly and inaccurate press coverage as she described it.

As the hon. Member for Ladywood mentioned, hon. Members on both sides of the House have been and remain concerned about journalistic abuses, especially invasions of privacy that cannot be justified in the public interest. The hon. Lady commented that a couple of years ago several private Members' Bills that would have given a right of privacy or a right of reply were introduced in response to cruel and irresponsible journalism that had caused widespread dismay in this place and among the general public. The Government were unable to support the Bills for reasons of principle and because of technical flaws. However, we announced on 21 April 1989 the setting up of a committee to consider the case for a new remedy for unwanted intrusions into privacy by the press.

The report of that committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. David Calcutt, was welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House on 21 June 1990. We accepted its main recommendations, which were for the replacement of the Press Council by a Press Complaints Commission, for new offences of unwarranted invasion of privacy for publication purposes and for slightly stricter court reporting restrictions. At the same time, and consistent with the Calcutt committee's approach, we made it clear that self-regulation under a new Press Complaints Commission was the industry's last chance to put its house in order, and that we would review the effectiveness of the commission after 18 months' operation to ascertain whether it should be put on a statutory footing.

We are naturally pleased that the industry set up the Press Complaints Commission at the beginning of the year, and did so with considerable dispatch. The previous Home Secretary welcomed the appointment of Lord McGregor of Durris as its chairman for his mixture of independence of view and experience as chairman of the last Royal Commission on the press, and more recently of the Advertising Standards Authority.

However, the composition of the commission—something to which the hon. Member for Ladywood referred particularly—its remit and its adjudicatory code are not matters for the Government at this stage, and we would not wish to influence them. We have made it clear that we are concerned only with the effectiveness of the new arrangements in terms of making abuses things of the past. We are not concerned with the detail of those arrangements. It is for the commission to decide how best to regulate the industry, but it is clear to me that the issues to which the hon. Lady referred are matters for the commission. I am not so certain that any of the activities that she described would be caught by the offences of physical intrusion recommended by the Calcutt committee

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

and accepted in principle by the Government, but they may be. I shall have to read the hon. Lady's remarks carefully.

The commission is proposing to adjudicate according to a code that will be modelled on, but not identical to, that proposed by the Calcutt committee. The code includes matters such as inaccuracy, to which the hon. Member for Ladywood referred, confusion of fact and comment, to which again she referred, opportunity to reply and, pre-eminently, intrusion into privacy. I suggest that the hon. Lady should do what she said she was intending to do, although she was sorry that she did not have the hot-line to do it, and ask the commission to intercede in the matters that she has outlined before publication. If the article is published, I suggest that she should consider whether to make a formal complaint on the ground that the code has been breached. Alternatively, I suggest that she takes both actions. For my part, I shall ensure that the official record of the debate is sent to the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission. In that way, the commission will have, at the earliest opportunity, the full catalogue of intrusion, innuendo and distortion to which the hon. Lady is convinced that she is being subjected and which, as I say, I can well understand she finds deeply hurtful.

I shall consider carefully the references that the hon. Lady has made to the police, as well as all the other important and worrying points that she made during her speech.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 24 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 31 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Regional Food

1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he is doing to encourage the production of regional food specialities; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): Grant aid has been available since March 1987 to encourage the formation of groups marketing speciality and regional foods.

Mr. Thurnham: When my hon. Friend next meets the bureaucrats in Brussels will he tell them how pleased we were when our hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food opened the national black pudding competition in Bolton? Will he tell them also that we wish to encourage such regional delicacies rather than have all our food homogenised?

Mr. Curry: I shall certainly pass on that message. I happen to know that one can get extremely good black pudding in Brussels, with apple sauce, its preferred accompaniment. We certainly wish to promote our regional foods—they are just as good as anybody else's. We will be on the watch to ensure that recipe law in Brussels does not produce precisely the protectionism to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Hunter: Despite the desirability of regional food specialities, surely the problem lies not so much in production but in the absence of profitability—something which applies not only to regional foods? Surely that is the matter which should be addressed.

Mr. Curry: I am not sure whether it is up to the Government to address the profitability of certain items. The Curry household purchases a considerable number of speciality foods and the Minister with responsibility for the housekeeping money makes adequate provision for the speciality foods that his wife persists in buying—that is, a Frenchwoman buying English speciality foods.

Industrial Fishing

3. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on industrial fishing; and what representations he has received on it.

Mr. Curry: Industrial fishing is not acceptable if it endangers stocks. Human consumption fisheries must always take priority.

Mr. Porter: I welcome my hon. Friend's condemnation of industrial fishing for the damage that it causes. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that it is the Government's policy to support the whole United Kingdom fishing industry in whatever part it occurs, whether it involves inshore fishermen, deep-sea fishermen, merchantmen and so on? Will my hon. Friend make every effort that he can to continue to support that industry?

Mr. Curry: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will know that we fought very hard to get a good deal in Brussels against proposals that were extremely dismal for the British industry. We got a particularly good swap for sole, which will benefit Lowestoft in which my hon. Friend takes a great interest. We are pushing for conservation measures at home if we do not get Communitywide agreement. Those two points are essential for the future of our industry.

Dr. Godman: Speaking as one who would like a complete ban on industrial fishing, may I offer my compliments to Her Majesty's Government for the decision to close the Shetland sandeel fishery? What compensation is being offered to Shetland fishermen who are being denied access to that fishery and who have to find alternative forms of fishing?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that conservation measures are in the interests of fishermen above all. I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has direct responsibility for that fishery. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Scottish Office has acted promptly. We regard conservation very seriously indeed, which is why we are consulting our own industry on conservation measures at this moment.

Mr. Salmond: Would not a clamp-down on industrial fishing on a European level be an infinitely preferable conservation measure to the eight-day tie-up which will risk the lives of fishermen at sea? Has the Minister seen the latest announcement on substantial aid to French fishermen in the current crisis? How can he justify the fact that every other European country is giving substantial aid to the fleet while he washes his hands of the fate of Scottish fishermen?

Mr. Curry: First, it is false to suggest that if industrial fishing ceased we could abandon all other conservation measures. That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman said and it is ridiculous. Secondly, my responsibilities cover British fishermen and I work in the interests of all fishermen in the United Kingdom. I do not have the

narrow parochialism which the hon. Gentleman persistently demonstrates. Thirdly, the Government put a great deal of support behind the fishing industry. The volume of Government support is considerable in relation to the size of that industry.

Mr. Morley: I add my congratulations to the Government on the action that they have taken in closing the Shetland industrial fisheries. It is an important conservation measure. But does the Minister accept that the eight-day tie-up is a restriction on fishermen who have used a wider mesh net, which is effective as a conservation measure? Why should those fishermen suffer from that blunt, ineffective and possibly downright dangerous measure? I understand—the Minister will perhaps confirm it—that the measure was suggested by our Government in Brussels.

Mr. Curry: I refute what the hon. Gentleman just said. The measure was in the Commission proposals. It derives from the recommendation that fishing effort should be reduced by 30 per cent. The reason for the proposal is that an absolute tie-up delivers a reduction in fishing. We have to recognise that that is the objective. However, the Government recognise, and have always preferred, measures to restrict gear, as they are more effective and a better means of tackling conservation. We have submitted to Brussels an alternative which is under consideration now. If Brussels accepted our proposal to use larger mesh sizes as an alternative it would enable us not to apply the eight-day rule. It is important that we deliver the conservation. We cannot do so unless fishermen recognise that the object is a lower effort against the fishery.

Equine Export

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to protect equines from live export after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): There have been no recent EC meetings to discuss the Commission's proposals on the welfare of animals during transport. When discussions resume we shall continue to press for the retention of controls to prevent horse exports for slaughter.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. Is he aware that I am the chairman of a committee of representatives from organisations throughout Britain which work for the welfare of horses and representatives of controlling interests? The committee is determined to bring to the attention of other European countries the need to take account of the welfare of horses. Horses are not merely pieces of flesh. They are important to this country. What are the Government doing to persuade the other 11 EC countries to support his admirable approach? Without effective effort in that direction we shall get nowhere.

Mr. Maclean: I am aware of the strong contribution that my hon. Friend makes to the cause of protecting horses. Of course, the Government are pressing, through every EC channel open to us, to retain the minimum value controls. I urge my hon. Friend, his committee and various other welfare organisations, who can perhaps move more freely in Europe and do not use the diplomatic channels that we use, to redouble their already excellent efforts to bring home to people in other European countries that the minimum value system should be retained.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that the matter causes concern in many areas—urban as much as rural areas? The anxiety is about not only horses but all animals. There is a feeling that if animals are to be killed, it is better that it happens before transport and that, if they are transported live, there should be stringent standards in force to ensure that there is no suffering.

Mr. Maclean: The majority of animals are slaughtered and exported to other countries in carcass form. We want the toughest possible controls on the movement of any animals to any country in the EC. However, we regard horses as a special category because of their particular physiological characteristics. Horses must be protected. The minimum value rules do it. They disadvantage no one commercially except Britain. We are happy to be disadvantaged commercially because of the welfare benefits.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that, the attitude of the British towards the health of horses is unique within the EC, which presumably explains the many letters that I have received from constituents calling for the retention of the minimum value system? I sympathise to the hilt with my constituents' concerns. Does my hon. Friend agree that, while those who write such letters to us fully accept that the problem is not of the Government's making, they look to the Government to ensure that, one way or another, the preservation and safety that we want, will remain?

Mr. Maclean: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government are making strenuous efforts to maintain the minimum value system. I understand that Ireland also has some special and unique controls. Horses and, I suspect dogs have a particular place of affection in the British character, probably going back many years in our history. We want to maintain that and there is no reason why we cannot. We shall use every means at our disposal to argue the case.

Mr. Ron Davies: May I assure the Minister that he will receive wholehearted support from the Labour party in any efforts that he intends to make to prevent the introduction of the live trade in equines for export and slaughter? Will he acknowledge that there are unique problems involved in the transport of equines from Ireland and Britain that are invariably linked to difficulties associated with transporting goods across the sea? If the Minister fails in his endeavours to maintain the minimum value legislation, will he use the specific geographical problems to which I referred in an effort to seek a derogation, if that is the necessary way to protect horses in this country?

Mr. Maclean: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's words and the consensus that exists among all parties in the House and all organisations in the country. There are many animal welfare issues on which we are not all in complete agreement, but on this one we are, which is helpful and strengthens our arm in Europe. We are fighting, as our first priority, to maintain our minimum value system. There are fall-back positions if we are not

successful in achieving that, and we can be fairly devious in coming up with other systems. However, our first priority is to win—let us not talk about alternatives, but let us persuade our European partners and everyone else to maintain the present system.

Mr. Moate: We know and appreciate how hard Ministers are working to prevent the export of live animals for slaughter, but will the Minister be frank with the House and answer the following question—if he fails, what power does Parliament have to prevent that vile trade?

Mr. Maclean: We do not intend to fail—we just do not intend to do so. I do not think it appropriate now to discuss any of those secondary issues.

Salmonella

5. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about his policy for reducing the level of food poisoning caused by salmonella.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have a whole range of measures for tackling the problem of salmonella food poisoning, whatever its source or wherever in the food chain it may appear.

Mr. Ashton: If that is so, why did the number of salmonella cases rise from 8,000 last year to 12,000? Surely, the policy is not working. Is it not a fact that many of the cases are due to imported eggs from the continent, which the Minister could—but did not—have tested under article 36 of the EC laws? Why should an egg producer like Mr. Chapman of Hayton near Retford in my constituency have his flock destroyed and part of his business closed down without any right of appeal, when imported eggs from the continent are allowed to come in without any such checks? Will the Minister take notice of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and the campaign that he has been waging to stop the spread of salmonella from increasing every year?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman and the House could do with a few facts. The latest update on the salmonella food poisoning in this country will show slight increase in salmonella food poisoning in humans—a large decrease in the salmonella typhimurium and an increase in salmonella enteritidis. The latest figures for 1990 will also show that in egg-laying flocks there has been a huge and dramatic decrease in salmonella enteritidis. Those figures point to the success of the control measures that we have taken.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that, when we have a common agricultural policy that is intended to ensure a level playing field in the market place, we should stress that the excellent measures that the Government have introduced to preserve people's health should extend throughout the European Community? Does he further agree that we should not tolerate the ridiculous situation that those producing eggs in Poland, Holland or wherever, do not have to reach the same high standards as British egg producers?

Mr. Maclean: We agree that the measures that we have taken here on salmonella should extend to other countries in the EC, and we are pressing most strongly that they do so, as we do with animal welfare. Other countries should see the wisdom of our ways. My hon. Friend has made a good marketing statement on behalf of British-produced eggs, as he has pointed out our superior system for detecting salmonella. Consumers can be reassured about home-produced eggs.

Pigs

6. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the alternatives to sow stalls and tethers in the housing of dry sows.

Mr. Maclean: On 10 January, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced the Government's intention to ban the installation of new close confinement stalls and tethers for pigs and to phase out existing systems of this type.

Mr. Murphy: As the Minister said, only a moment ago, that he was concerned about animal welfare, he must agree that there is widespread concern about some aspects of intensive farming, particularly pig farming. Therefore, will he give a guarantee that the Government, and he in particular, will support the private Members Bill dealing with pig husbandry going through the House?

Mr. Maclean: There is no difference between the main principles of the Bill and the regulations that my right hon. Friend the Minister intends to make. The trouble is that the Bill does not go as far as our regulations would go, nor does it encompass all the categories of animals—boars, fattening animals and animals in the field. Our regulations are a bit better.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the coming into effect of the regulations of which he speaks is the same throughout the EC and throughout the whole of the United Kingdom so that our producers are not put at a disadvantage compared with imports either from other EEC countries or other parts of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Gummer: I take my hon. Friend's point. That is why we must ensure that we phase out our systems within a sensible time scale, so that the rest of Europe will be able to come in to our time scale. If we move precipitately on that, we may not be able to get complete agreement in the EEC, but we are pressing most strongly that other countries should follow our lead on this.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I have listened with interest to what the Minister had to say about the Bill to be introduced tomorrow. At this late stage, will the Government assure the House that they will support the Bill?

Mr. Maclean: I have made it clear that I believe that our regulations go further and are superior to the proposals in the Bill. If the House waits, it will hear, when I speak in the debate on the Bill tomorrow, my response to it and what I have to say about the regulations, on which we started to consult yesterday.

Less-favoured Areas

7. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of Government assistance to sheep and cattle farmers in the less-favoured areas.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): In addition to the support measures from which all sheep and cattle farmers benefit, producers in the less-favoured areas are eligible for a number of payments which are specific to those LFAs.

Mr. Amos: As the incomes of hill farmers in my constituency are now under considerable pressure, will my right hon. Friend take urgent measures to deal with the unacceptably long delays in the processing of payments for grants and subsidies? For example, one of my constituents, Mr. David Ridley, told me that it has taken four months to deal with his suckler cow premium and with an agricultural improvement scheme. Another farmer told me that the hill livestock compensatory allowance payment distribution forms are already four weeks later than they were last year. As a matter of urgency, will my right hon. Friend deal with this administrative inefficiency?

Mr. Gummer: We are concerned to help my hon. Friend and farmers generally in respect of these matters. However, when the European Community changes the arrangements we have to change the whole system of payment and that holds matters up. I am trying to proceed as fast as possible. The fact that the HLCA payment forms have not yet been initiated arises from a legal problem between ourselves and the rest of the Community over the arrangements for the 1·4 headage limit decision. I did not want that decision. Indeed, I fought and voted against it. These delays are one of its costs. That is why I supported the bringing forward of some of the payments and this has at least helped to ameliorate farmers' problems.

Mr. Pike: Does not the Minister, despite his reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) a moment ago, recognise that the farmers in less-favoured areas—where, owing to difficulties in the industry, people are going out of business at an increasing rate—fear that land will return to the state that prevailed in the 1930s if the Government do not take action? Is it not a fact that serious difficulties arise from delays in making payments such as HLCA? Does the Minister agree that the Government really will have to do something to put this money into the hands of farmers as soon as possible? The situation is absolutely critical.

Mr. Gummer: Our concern is to get to farmers the payments that are due to them as quickly as possible. However, we cannot do that unless the legal arrangements are satisfactory. We are pressing, but we are still waiting for the Commission to come back to us on these matters. I shall take action the moment I can and I am considering ways of ameliorating the situation thereafter.

Mr. Hague: While accepting that most of the problem arising from the delay in making HLCA payments lies with the European Community, may I ask my right hon. Friend for an assurance that, when that problem is sorted out, every effort will be made to get the payments through to the farmers by approximately the same time as last year, which was early or mid-March?

Mr. Gummer: I can assure my hon. Friend that if it is humanly possible to make up for the delay that has been forced upon us, we shall do so.

EC Intervention Stores

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current level of foodstuffs held in European Economic Community intervention stores in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: A table showing intervention stocks held in the EC and in the United Kingdom is deposited monthly in the House of Commons Library. The latest figures were tabled on 15 January.

Mr. Banks: I thank the Minister for that fulsome reply. He knows that those intervention dumps of foodstuffs are now at a higher level. That is indeed very regrettable. Do the Government accept that the CAP is an absurdity which is ruining the European ideal? Is not it obscene that at a time when millions of people in Africa are suffering starvation they and we see large quantities of food that cannot be sold on the European market being stuffed into ever-increasing intervention stores?

Mr. Curry: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on seeking so quickly to forge a new career in agriculture politics. I am sure that his Front Bench will welcome his conversion as much as I do. The most important point that he made concerned the effect on the third world. European surpluses are not an answer to the third world's problem. That is why a successful outcome to the GATT talks is of particular importance to the third world. With improved access to their products, the people there could earn their own livelihood. It is a very firm part of the Government's policy, first, that the GATT talks should succeed and, secondly, that some of the causes of these surpluses should be removed by bringing production under control and getting it closer to the marketplace. That has been and will remain our policy.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Is it appropriate to consider the level of intervention stocks in the context of EC proposals for agricultural reform? Do not those reform proposals discriminate against all but the very smallest European farms and appear to lack economic rationale?

Mr. Curry: There are four fundamental objections to the proposals that have been made. The first is that, quite simply, they are anti-economic. Any system that is designed to take an economic unit that can compete in the market place and render it incapable of competition must make nonsense economically. Secondly, of course, they are massively discriminatory against the United Kingdom and that is something we shall not tolerate. Thirdly, they cost a great deal. Fourthly, they are wide open to fraud. For those reasons the United Kingdom Government will be obliged to oppose the proposals. We have a much better scheme for reforming the CAP. What we want is to get genuinely into the marketplace and make sure that we create units that can survive in more market-oriented conditions.

Mr. David Clark: Will the Minister be a little less coy in future when answering questions such as this? Will he confirm that there are 700,000 tonnes of beef, 260,000 tonnes of butter and 335,000 tonnes of skimmed milk in intervention stores? Will he further confirm that the CAP budget is likely to be increased by 25 per cent. in the next two years and that, as he told the Oxford farming conference, unless we take action quickly the CAP will be out of control?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman wants recital of stock levels, I am perfectly willing to give one, but it would take at least 20 minutes. Yes, as I said at the Oxford conference, the CAP is in serious difficulty because, irrespective of the GATT negotiations, there is a major budgetary problem. Many circumstances have contributed to that. There has been the BSE crisis, during which the Opposition did not go out of their way to help us to reassure the public that the measures that we took were adequate—indeed, quite the opposite. Problems have also been caused by the Gulf crisis, the impoverishment of eastern Europe, the drought, German unification, increased imports and changing consumption patterns. On top of that, we have declining consumption and increasing output. They are structural problems which cannot be avoided. Yes, we are back in a serious situation, we will have to tackle it, and it would have to be tackled whether or not GATT existed.

Mr. Bellingham: What percentage of United Kingdom taxpayers' support for agriculture is getting through to the British farmer and thence to the rural economy rather than being eaten up in the corruption and bureaucracy of the CAP?

Mr. Curry: Most Community support goes towards market regimes, which means that it does not go directly to the farmer's pocket. For example, the substantial amount of money that we put into supporting beef last year has not appeared in the form of a cheque to the farmer. But that support is essential to prevent an immense drain on the taxpayer and major problems for farmers. One reason why the new proposals in Brussels are unacceptable to us is that opportunities for fraud are almost inherent in them. We have always fought that and we shall continue to do so.

Agriculture Subsidies

9. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the remit given to European Community negotiators on agricultural subsidies at the December GATT talks; and what changes have been agreed to their remit for the resumed GATT talks.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission negotiated at the December meeting in close consultation with member states on the basis of the offer that the Council of Ministers had approved in November.

Mr. Allen: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to tell the House the Government's position in the resumed GATT negotiations? Does he agree with the *Financial Times* yesterday that the situation of industry and manufactured and agricultural products could be as serious for the world as the Gulf situation is? Will he use the GATT negotiations as a lever to secure a more sensible CAP, which I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to see?

Mr. Gummer: The Government's position on reform of the CAP has been and is clear. On the GATT round, it was Britain which managed to get the Community to put forward its offer, it is we who have sought to increase the elbow room in negotiations by the Commission and it is we who supported the Commission and pressed it to negotiate effectively. However, there must be a two-way negotiation and we hope that when negotiations are properly resumed the United States will begin to negotiate round the table and stay there until a solution has been found, rather than addressing the rest of the world as though everyone else had to change their system to fit in with the needs of American farmers.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Has my right hon. Friend read the excellent letter from Sir Simon Gourlay in *The Times* today and, if so, does he agree with its principal point that the MacSharry proposals would be devastating for British agriculture? May we have an assurance that he will reject those proposals outright?

Mr. Gummer: Sir Simon Gourlay's letter in *The Times* today was extremely effective and pointed out clearly that it is not a sensible policy for European agriculture to make it impossible for efficient farms to compete and to prop up farms that have no chance of competing anywhere. It would not be good for Europe to go back to the canal age in agriculture.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister stop running away from the problem? Does he not appreciate that while the GATT talks are perceived in this country as an agricultural problem, they are indeed an industrial problem? Unless we resolve the problem we shall get into a world trade war. As the key is in agriculture, will the Minister put forward, for the House to debate, a set of proposals for the reform of the CAP so that farmers and consumers may get a fairer deal and we as taxpayers will pay less towards it?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman seems not to realise that this country is a member of the European Community. He should come to terms with the fact that negotiations about GATT are done by the Community and that the common agricultural policy is a Community policy and not something that comes out of the back pockets of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. It has to be negotiated in the Community if it is to succeed. My job is to do the negotiation. So far, we have got the Community to move sharply towards us in the negotiations on GATT and at long last we have convinced the Community that a radical reform of the CAP is necessary. We have now got to get a sensible reform which does not prejudice the United Kingdom. That is my battle and that battle is in the Community, rather than merely trying to make a few cheap points on the Floor of the House.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that Cheshire dairy farmers wish to see the GATT round brought to a successful conclusion in the best interests of world trade, but that they reject totally the MacSharry proposals, in their present form, to cut milk quotas? That would result in this country having to cut back dairy and milk production by four times more than Germany and would have an adverse effect upon the competitiveness on our processing sector.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend might put it even more clearly. It would mean that there would hardly be a dairy farmer in Cheshire who would not have his quota cut by 10 per cent. and that there would hardly be a dairy farmer in Ireland who would not keep exactly the quota which he has now.

Council for the Protection of Rural England

10. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the Council for the Protection of Rural England to discuss the impact of agriculture on the environment.

Mr. Gummer: My noble Friend the Minister of State met the Council for the Protection of Rural England on two occasions in 1990, the last on 1 August.

Mr. Jones: Has the Minister noticed the uncanny resemblance between the recently leaked proposals from the Commission for the reform of the CAP and CPRE's excellent document, "Future harvests"? Is he aware also of the policies of the National Consumer Council and of the Labour party, which are also virtually indistinguishable from those proposals? Will he now change his approach to the problem?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not doing his party the disservice of suggesting that Labour policy is to ensure that the United Kingdom, alone of the countries of Europe, will carry the vast proportion of the cost of reform of the CAP. If that is what he says, I hope that my hon. Friends will make sure that every farmer, every consumer and every patriot knows.

Mr. Robert Hicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a key factor in upholding the countryside environment and supporting the rural economy is a prosperous agriculture, since farmers are the managers of the countryside? Is he aware of the real difficulties currently facing livestock producers, particularly in the south-west? Will he confirm that, if the proposals put forward by Mr. MacSharry were to be implemented, the position would deteriorate still further?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right in saying that unless there is a prosperous farming, there can be no resources for farmers to look after the land. Therefore, if proposals would reduce the ability of competitive farmers, particularly in Britain, Denmark and Holland, those countries would find that the resources that we need for the environment were not available. My hon. Friend is right in saying that we oppose the MacSharry proposals because they would not deliver a reduction in the cost of the common agricultural policy, they would not preserve the environment and they would not protect the Community against fraud. They would enshrine for ever an entirely out-of-date, small farm system which cannot provide livings for farmers who remain on the land.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the Minister accept that, with the common agricultural policy in growing difficulties and with the problems arising from the GATT negotiations, it is time for us to rethink what the common agricultural policy is all about and that agricultural support should move to support for environmental protection? Will he also accept that in rural areas the survival of small farmers is paramount?

Mr. Gummer: It depends on what the hon. Gentleman means by "small farmers". If he means family farmers as we know them in the United Kingdom, that is reasonable, but if by small farmers he means what Mr. MacSharry means by small farmers, none of the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be very pleased.

I therefore suggest to the hon. Gentleman that his first point is the better one—that we need progressively to move support that now goes almost exclusively to production-oriented systems towards help in looking after the environment. That is not the proposal of Mr. MacSharry, and I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) dissociates himself from the interpretation of his party's policy that we had from the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) earlier.

Common Agricultural Policy

11. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to seek to persuade other EC Agriculture Ministers to reduce the costs and eliminate the surpluses of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I take every opportunity to promote a more rational and market-oriented common agricultural policy, with greater emphasis on the protection and improvement of the environment, as my answer to the previous question shows.

Mr. Wilshire: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the latest proposals put forward would penalise British farmers with average-sized farms? Does he agree that the real purpose of reform of the common agricultural policy should be to reward efficiency and to help farmers compete on the world stage rather than to featherbed pocket-handkerchief homesteads and thus isolate them from market forces in the world outside the Common Market?

Mr. Gummer: I think that my hon. Friend will agree that in no other sphere would the European Community decide to opt out of international competition. It is therefore important to have competitive agriculture. But I suggest that the second aspect is that we need agriculture that can look after the land, so we need a greater emphasis on the environment at the same time.

Mr. Martlew: When discussions take place about reducing food surpluses, European Governments always discuss compensation for farmers. When will discussions take place on compensating employees in the food processing industry who lose their jobs? For example, if export restitutions are done away with, 30,000 employees will lose their jobs and I fear that some of them will be my constituents. Will the Minister introduce a scheme to compensate them?

Mr. Gummer: I think that the Minister ought first to be concerned to ensure that the kind of export restitutions to which the hon. Gentleman refers are not abolished in the haphazard way that some have suggested. That is why we cannot dissociate export restitutions from the rest of the Community system—one of the propositions that the United States has put forward. That is why we and our Common Market colleagues have said that they must be part of the whole system and that the whole system must be reduced in a sensible, measured way. In those circumstances, we can protect jobs in a competitive environment.

USA (Agricultural Support)

13. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on direct and indirect support to agriculture by the United States of America.

Mr. Curry: Provisional estimates by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development are that total transfers to United States agriculture were some US $67 billion in 1989, of which $46 billion was directly funded by taxpayers and the remainder by consumers.

Mr. Lord: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer which indicates clearly that United States farmers are subsidised every bit as much as European farmers are. Will he assure the House that, although a satisfactory result on the GATT round is very important to everyone, it will not be achieved at the expense of our very efficient and hard-pressed farmers?

Mr. Curry: The level of subsidy is rather higher in the Community than it is in the United States and there is no point in trying to avoid that, but, although both sets of farmers are heavily subsidised, the subsidies are as nothing compared with those in Japan. It is extremely important to do a deal that is fair to both sides so that farmers can compete in the world market when they are efficient and looking to the marketplace.

Irradiated Food

14. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure the adequate protection of the public in respect of irradiated food in the United Kingdom since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Gummer: The interests of consumers are fully protected by separate licensing and labelling regulations which came into effect on 1 January.

Mr. Michael: Can the Minister explain to us how that choice and protection can be offered, when there is no simple scientific test to show whether food is irradiated, especially when it comes from abroad?

Mr. Gummer: First, whether we have irradiation in this country or not, there has always been a problem with irradiated food from other countries. By making it legal, licensing it and being careful about the places where it can be done, we are able to protect the public very much more, and we shall insist upon the labelling of all foods in such a way that the public can choose. I am not one of those who believe that it is the Government's duty to force the prejudices of some upon others. People ought to choose and I shall choose irradiated food as being considerably safer.

PRIME MINISTER

Common European Currency

Q1. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister what discussions have taken place recently with other EC member states regarding the use of a common European currency.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): The intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union opened in Rome on 15 December 1990. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor represented the United Kingdom. The next ministerial meeting will take place on 28 January and my right hon. Friend will continue to argue for the United Kingdom's proposals for the introduction of a common European currency, the hard ecu.

Mr. Hunter: Despite the failure of the common agricultural policy and of attempts to form a common defence and foreign policy, does my right hon. Friend nevertheless accept that the common currency has the supreme merit of being market-led and that its use will be determined by demand and not imposed by centralised bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. That is the essence of our proposal on a common currency. No one would have the hard ecu forced upon them. It will be for firms, individuals and Governments to use, as and when they wish. I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that our proposals now seem to be attracting more support.

Mr. Bell: While I share his views on the common European currency, can the Prime Minister tell the House how useful a common foreign policy would have been leading up to the events of 15 January?

The Prime Minister: I think that the question of a common foreign policy is one of the matters that will be discussed at the political intergovernmental conference. The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I had to say about that on Tuesday.

Sir William Clark: As bonds are being issued in greater numbers in ecu and as from March this year futures will be able to be dealt with in ecu, does my right hon. Friend agree that that adds weight to the argument that the hard ecu as an alternative currency to sterling could come about without anything being foisted upon us?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. That is certainly the case. The real virtue of the hard ecu is that it would be determined by the market, driven by the market, and not imposed upon anyone.

Engagements

Q2. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Michie: In view of the Foreign Secretary's discussions in Paris today, does the Prime Minister agree that long-term peace in the middle east should be based on nations enjoying security within existing recognised national boundaries?

The Prime Minister: That is one of the matters that have been under discussion for some time and which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is continuing to discuss with his colleagues. In so far as the particular problems of the middle east are concerned, as the hon. Lady knows, we strongly support the idea of a peace conference once the present conflict in the Gulf has been resolved.

Q3. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, once Saddam Hussein has been expelled from Kuwait and reinvestment and reconstruction have commenced, those countries that have contributed most to the allied effort in terms of money, material and men should be at the front of the queue for jobs, work and contracts, and that those among our near neighbours who have contributed least should be firmly at the rear of the queue?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about that and I had the opportunity of raising the matter with the Emir of Kuwait during my recent visit to the Gulf.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister agree with me that it is good for the morale of our forces and for the peace of mind of their families if there is easy, low-cost communication with home? What progress is being made in improving the current inadequate arrangements? Does the Prime Minister share my view that, just as our forces have long had access to free post, it is now appropriate in 1991 for them to have at least one free phone call from the Gulf?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the general proposition put forward by the right hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is working to improve communications home. However, we have not yet produced a free telephone system.

Mr. Grylls: Has my right hon. Friend had any further news from the Red Cross about the future treatment of British prisoners of war?

The Prime Minister: We are trying hard at the moment to get access. The International Red Cross is trying as well and I believe that it has had a preliminary meeting with the Iraqi authorities, but we have not yet heard what the detailed outcome may be.

Q4. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me advance notice of the supplementary question that he intended to ask. No one wants a ground war in the Gulf—no one at all—and it can be avoided. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry—I will let the hon. Gentleman ask his supplementary question.

Mr. Barnes: In the Prime Minister's answer to the question that I asked on Tuesday, he said that civilian casualties were to be avoided as far as possible and the instructions to the Air Force were to seek to avoid civilian casualties in Iraq. Will the Prime Minister therefore contact President Bush and tell him to desist from B52 carpet bombing, which is destroying vast areas around Basra where I loyally did my national service, to desist from napalm bombing in future and to desist from a ground battle which will lead to massive destruction and perhaps mutual destruction of both sets of troops?

The Prime Minister: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for beginning to answer his question before he had asked it. As he knows, this was brought about entirely by his courtesy in giving me advance notice of the question, for which I am most grateful. It is a conspiracy which may not last for ever, but it is enjoyable while it does.

No one wants a ground war and it can be avoided if Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait, as we have asked him to do for some time. We have made it perfectly clear before—and I reiterate—that we shall not use certain weapons, but I would not think it right to spare the Iraqi military at the possible risk to British soldiers at some future stage in the conflict. My prime and overriding concern must be, and will continue to be, for the safety of British soldiers and for the avoidance of unnecessary risk.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing presence in London of the Iraqi ambassador is not only offensive but unnecessary? After a suitable period for him to settle his personal affairs, will my right hon. Friend arrange for him to be removed forthwith?

The Prime Minister: We have already reduced the Iraqi embassy to a minimum number of four members. The Iraqi ambassador will be leaving the United Kingdom very shortly and we are considering further reductions below the tiny number still there. Final decisions on the last point have not yet been made.

Q5. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Trimble: I wish to express our concern about recent events in the Baltic states, where Mr. Gorbachev appears to be reverting to type—if he did not authorise the recent outrages, he is clearly compromising himself to the elements behind them. Will the Government now commit themselves unequivocally to giving every support to democracy in the Baltic states and does the Prime Minister agree that it would be entirely wrong for Moscow to impose direct rule?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point—it would be wholly wrong and I was able to say so to Mr. Jurkans, the Latvian Foreign Minister, when I had the opportunity of meeting him yesterday. I deeply deplore the actions that have taken place in both Vilnius and Riga, and the tragic consequences for those who have been killed. This is not what we have come to expect from the Soviet Union in recent years and we hope that it will stop without delay.

Q6. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: At a time when I know that my hon. Friend has many things on his mind—including the plight of our prisoners of war who are in Iraqi hands—will he spare a thought for ex-prisoners of war from another campaign? Is he aware that in 1951 ex-Japanese prisoners of war received only £76 10s from Japan, which is equivalent to about £1,000 in today's money? Will he support their campaign to try to achieve a more appropriate settlement from their now wealthy ex-captors?

The Prime Minister: I understand and sympathise with my hon. Friend's point. The problem is that the question

of compensation was settled under the peace treaty with Japan which was signed in 1951. Under that treaty, Japan subsequently met her obligations. I fear that I must tell my hon. Friend that, much to my regret, the Government can take no further action.

Q7. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Prime Minister aware of today's reports that Secretary of State Baker has a list of 500 firms from 50 countries which have apparently broken the embargo on Iraq and that the list includes a large number of German firms which appear to be still supplying Iraq with biological and chemical materials? Will the Prime Minister reassure the House that no British firm is on that American list? Does he agree that the families of the young men and women who have been sent to the Gulf—as a result of a policy with which I still disagree—would be horrified to think that the sacrifice that they may be called upon to make in the days and weeks ahead will have been made so that mere shareholders can grow richer out of profiteering?

The Prime Minister: I think that I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. I am not aware of any involvement by British firms in the Iraqi chemical weapon programme. Although we stand ready to follow up energetically any advice to the contrary that we may receive, thus far I have no evidence whatever, from any source of any kind, of any British involvement.

Mr. Warren: Bearing in mind the very successful meeting that I understand my right hon. Friend to have had this week with the visiting Foreign Minister from Latvia, may I ask whether he will use the occasion to condemn before the House the Stalinist repression that has returned to the inventory of Gorbachev and the Government of the Soviet Union and get the whole of the west to condemn the abuse of human rights to which the people of the Baltic states are being subjected?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly content to do that. The present situation in the Baltics is clearly precarious. I must say that it is not entirely clear who is responsible for the latest actions there. It is not absolutely clear who gave the directions that led to the difficulties in Vilnius and Riga. In any event, we shall need to judge the Soviet Union by deeds and not words, and that is what we will do.

Q8. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: If nothing is ruled in and nothing is ruled out in the fundamental review of the poll tax, may we take it that there will be statutory provisions rather than merely guidance to local authorities, which is not always observed, to exempt from payment of the poll tax service men and service women who are serving abroad, which includes the 270 of my constituents from RAF Leuchars now serving in the Gulf?

The Prime Minister: The power the hon. and learned Member seeks is already available to local authorities and has been for some time.

York (Visit)

Q9. **Mr. Conal Gregory:** To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to make an official visit to York.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gregory: In the hope that my right hon. Friend will shortly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question actually deals with a visit to York. However, the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) may continue with his supplementary question.

Mr. Gregory: In the hope that my right hon. Friend will shortly be able to visit the city of York, may I ask him to use this opportunity to praise employee share schemes, particularly those in denationalised companies such as British Telecom and British Rail Engineering? Will he give a warning to the people of York that in the unlikely event of there ever being a Labour Government, they would take away the right—*[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: Certainly, I will be happy to carry a suitable message to York or elsewhere on the value and importance of employee share ownership. I think that that is rightly recognised. One of the clearest indications of the success of the privatisation programme and employee ownership is the disinclination among those once in favour of nationalisation to renationalise that which has been privatised.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Prime Minister tell the House what prospects he sees for an early reduction in interest rates—[HON. MEMBERS: "In York?"] Such a reduction will, of course, affect enterprises in York. Will he also tell the House whether it is true that he said that interest rates in York and elsewhere would come down when Chelsea won the league championship? Notwithstanding the excellent result at Tottenham Hotspur last night, is the Prime Minister aware that large numbers of points would have to be taken away from Liverpool and Arsenal if Chelsea were to win and that he would have to make it illegal for any team to beat Chelsea during the remainder of this season? If he takes that very original approach towards the reduction of interest rates in this country—and in York—he will have my wholehearted support.

The Prime Minister: I look forward to the hon. Member's appointment as spokesman for sport in the not-too-distant future. I can only say that much as I look forward to Chelsea winning the championship at some stage, I hope that I shall not have to wait quite that long for a reduction in interest rates.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 28 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Ports Bill.

Motion on the Financial Services Act 1986 (Delegation) Order.

TUESDAY 29 JANUARY—Motions on the English revenue support grant reports followed by motions on the Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY—Opposition day (4th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Recession in Industry". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Famine in Sub-Saharan Africa". Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

Motions on the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order and the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) (Consequential Amendments) Order.

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Bill.

Motion on Members' pensions.

The Chairman of Ways and Means will name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Second Reading of the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Tuesday 29 January to consider EC Document No. 6459/90 relating to obstacles to takeovers and other general bids; and European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 30 January at 10.30 am to consider EC Document No. 6701/90 relating to emissions of gaseous pollutants from diesel engines.

[Tuesday 29 January 1991

1. (i) Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1991-92 (HC 93)

(ii) The Population Report (England) (No. 2) (HC 94)

(iii) Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) (HC 95)

(iv) Special Grant Report (No. 2) (HC 96)

(v) Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1989-90 (HC 12)

2. (i) Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1991-92 (HC 78)

(ii) Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 2) (HC 79)

(iii) Distribution of non-domestic rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 2) (HC 80).

European Standing Committee B

Tuesday 29 January 1991

Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 6459/90 Barriers to Takeovers

(b) Unnumbered Company Law

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 11-xxvii (1989-90)

(b) HC 11-xiv (1989-90) and HC 11-xxvii (1989-90)

European Standing Committee A

Wednesday 30 January 1991

Relevant European Community Document

6701/90 Emissions by diesel engined vehicles

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee

HC 11-xxxii (1989-90).]

Mr. Grocott: Can the Leader of the House give us an absolute assurance that any developments in the Gulf will be reported immediately, swiftly and in full to the House, and that, however inconvenient the time, he will ensure that the relevant Minister comes to the House to tell us as much as possible about what is happening?

We are still waiting for a debate on the autumn statement. We need to debate the economy urgently. All our constituents are being affected by the recession, by the record bankruptcies and by rising unemployment, and we need to debate that.

When shall we get the long-promised debate on the Cullen report on the Piper Alpha disaster? It is long overdue.

We shall have only one and a half hours to debate the Welsh revenue support grant. That is inadequate. When will the Leader of the House allocate more time for vital debates on poll tax-related issues?

On Thursday, we shall have debates on pensions and related matters, and on resettlement grants. When will the orders be put before the House? Can the Leader of the House assure us that he has taken careful note of the massively supported early-day motion 299?

[That, in the opinion of this House, paragraph (2) of the third Resolution of this House of 19th July 1983, which provides that resettlement grants for former Members should not be payable to a person who has attained the age of 65 years before the dissolution of the present or any future Parliament should no longer have effect, and that the following new provision should be made: (a) That the resettlement grant should not be payable, on the dissolution of the present or any future Parliament, to any person who had attained the age of 65 years at the dissolution of the preceding Parliament; but That (b) regardless of age, a person who has completed a total of 20 years' service as a Member of this House becomes eligible for the grant when it becomes payable under the first paragraph of the third Resolution of 19th July 1983, irrespective of whether that service was continuous, subject to paragraph (3) of the said Resolution.]

Mr. MacGregor: On developments in the Gulf, I made our position clear the other evening in response to some points of order; for the convenience of the House, I shall say it again. Clearly we have every desire to report any major incidents to the House. To apply that to "any developments in the Gulf" would be overstating the case, because it is important that we confine such reports to major changes in the Gulf. We have made it clear from all that we have done so far that we are extremely keen to keep the House fully informed. The hon. Gentleman used the word "immediately". I am sure that he recognises that

it is important that we have knowledge of the facts before statements are made and that we do not rely only on unconfirmed media reports.

I hope that we shall be able to have the debate on the autumn statement in the very near future. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are other opportunities to debate economic issues, and we are happy to have such debates. We shall have such a debate this afternoon, and there is to be another next week in Opposition time.

I hope to find time for the Cullen report before too long. The House will recognise that there is quite a lot of pressure on business in the House at the moment and that has, of course, been intensified by the need for debates and statements on the Gulf. There are also a number of Second Readings to come forward. However, I am well aware of the House's anxiety for a debate on the report before long, and I recognise the importance of the issue.

The arrangements that I have announced for the Welsh revenue support grant are as normal and, I hope, for the general convenience of the House.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to say that I am anxious that the House should have before it all the information on which to have the debates on pensions and related matters. I have arranged for the draft regulations, which are part of the motion, to be placed in the Vote Office this afternoon, and I will also answer a question this afternoon in response to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), as chairman of the trustees of the pension fund, in relation to a possible reference of some matters to the Top Salaries Review Body. That will be recorded in *Hansard* so that all colleagues will have the opportunity to look at it before the debate.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) referred to early-day motion 299. I am aware of the great interest in the matter because there are many signatories to the motion. Representations on this point have already been made through the usual channels. The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will have an opportunity to raise the issue in the debates next Thursday. It will be appropriate for me to comment on the early-day motion at that time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the object of business questions is to ask about business next week. I shall be grateful if hon. Members will confine themselves to that and ask one question, because we have a very long list of hon. Members who wish to take part in the subsequent debate in which, I am afraid, I shall have to put a limit on speeches anyway. So I ask hon. Members for brief questions, please, to the point and about business next week.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I appreciate what my right hon. Friend said about the possibility of raising the question of the early-day motion on resettlement grants of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), but in view of all the other matters to be debated at that time, which are rather different, and in view of the quite unprecedented support for the early-day motion on both sides of the House, would it not be a good idea to have a separate debate on this issue so that the House might concentrate on it and give its views very strongly, which I believe the Top Salaries Review Body wants to hear?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can do that in advance of next Thursday's debate because I have already announced the business. We ought to see how that debate goes before we consider whether any further time should be given to that subject. But I certainly hope that we make sure that we give enough time for all the issues to be debated next Thursday and certainly for this one to be aired as well.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the Leader of the House will agree that, but for the very serious events in the Gulf, the developments in the Baltic states would be attracting world attention, including the attention of the House. Does he hold out any prospect of an early debate on that subject?

The question of the European Community decision to limit fisheries and for people engaged in fishing to tie up for eight consecutive days a month must be dealt with by secondary legislation. The Government are seeking power to stop people prosecuting their means of livelihood. Will that matter be debated on the Floor of the House?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point about the Baltic states, of course I understand the concern in the House, and we have already had some statements and opportunities for discussion. I am fully aware of the hon. Gentleman's point, and I think that he put it in the right context. We must keep a watchful eye on the situation and see whether more time for discussing it in the House is required. Obviously I can do that, and I give him that assurance.

On the second point, I cannot give an assurance that the matter will be dealt with on the Floor of the House. It is something that we shall have to look at in due course.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): With reference to the debate on Tuesday on the revenue support grant, can my right hon. Friend say whether there will be a time limit? Many of us are unhappy about the settlement for our areas and would desperately like to speak in the debate. Therefore, may we also have an extension of the debate so that those of us who feel strongly about the settlement can have our say?

Mr. MacGregor: I will consider my hon. Friend's point. Exactly the same point arose on the old rate support grant orders, and there was similar anxiety among hon. Members to speak. On this occasion, we are following the practice that we have followed in the past.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Has the Leader of the House read the reports about innocent people having been killed in Iraq, Israel and Saudi Arabia? There have been reports of 40 people in Iraq having been killed. The ambassador told me this week that more than 200 people had been killed and that churches, mosques and schools had been blitzed. Does the Leader of the House agree that the killing of people on both sides will only escalate the war?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that question arises on the business of the House. There are plenty of opportunities for the issue to be discussed, and the hon. Gentleman will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this afternoon.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): As the Gulf war is probably one of the best covered by the media in our experience, will my right hon. Friend restrain his

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

ministerial colleagues from coming to the House to make statements on every small incident? Will he restrict statements in the House to major events that affect the British forces, in particular, during the course of the Gulf war?

Mr. MacGregor: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe that the whole House recognises that at present my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence have very heavy responsibilities and work loads. It would be a mistake to ask them to make statements in the House on each and every incident reported in the media, particularly since some are corrected immediately afterwards. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important, therefore, to concentrate statements on major events that affect the Gulf as a whole. However, these are matters that can be discussed through the usual channels on any occasion.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): On the question of telephone communications from forces in the Gulf to their families at home, may we take the matter much further next week than the Prime Minister was able to take it today? It now costs more than £1 a minute to telephone home, and many squaddies simply cannot afford that. British Telecom is helping financially, but the Ministry of Defence should make a significant contribution and help still further. May we please have a statement from the Ministry of Defence next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure whether an oral statement would be an appropriate method of dealing with that point, but I shall ensure that the right hon. Gentleman's comment is conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the grave concern in the House and elsewhere about the treatment of British prisoners in Iraq. Notwithstanding what he said a moment ago about the usefulness of statements by Ministers, is he aware of calls for a war crimes investigation unit at the Ministry of Defence? Has he read articles in today's papers stating that such a unit has now been set up at the Ministry? Would this not be an appropriate issue on which to have a ministerial statement as soon as possible at the beginning of next week?

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly the whole House shares the concern about our prisoners of war. I shall ensure that his request is put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Again, I am not sure whether that is an appropriate issue for an oral statement, but I shall put the point to him.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I refer to the question of Thursday's business regarding pensions and redundant Ministers. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be properly seized of the point that was made about early-day motion 299, which carries a substantial number of signatures—more than 340. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be a little more positive than he was previously about what he proposes to do. There is strong feeling in the House.

Surely the right hon. Gentleman agrees that it would be monstrous if we were to make a decision on ministerial pensions for Ministers who become redundant and left the matter in abeyance when there is such strong feeling in the House about the motion.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to go into the substance of that point today because I do not think that it is appropriate to do so at business questions. I hoped that it was clear from the indication that I gave at the outset, in response to the question of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), that I have already been discussing the matter and that it will be possible for it to be discussed and raised next Thursday. There is an early opportunity for that early-day motion to be aired on the Floor of the House. Of course, I have noted the number of signatories to it.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware of concern in the House about what could only be described as the lukewarm or half-hearted support that our European partners have given us and the United States in our efforts in the Gulf. May we look forward to the Government considering some mechanism within Europe that will make those who use Gulf oil pay for it so that they can contribute towards the cost of our forces in the Gulf?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall take that point a little more generally and talk about it in terms of contributions to efforts in the Gulf by member states of the European Community and beyond. My hon. Friend knows that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and in particular the Defence Secretary and the Chancellor, are actively pursuing that point at the moment.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I appreciate the seriousness with which the Leader of the House views events in the Baltic states. However, is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the deep desire in the House for an early debate or statement on the matter, not only because of the loss of 19 lives in Latvia and Lithuania, the political and international implications of events there and the threat to the sovereignty of free states, but because decisions will have to be reached about how the European Community views the extending of aid to the Soviet Union against that background?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the gravity of the matter and the anxiety of the House about it. I have already made that clear. I shall convey to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and discuss with him, the points made not only by the hon. Lady but by several other hon. Members. The hon. Lady will be aware that my right hon. Friend has argued that, if repression in the Baltic states continues, the programme of aid to the Soviet Union proposed by the European Council should not be implemented. That was endorsed by the meeting of Foreign Ministers in Brussels this Tuesday. It was agreed that only humanitarian aid should be continued. Therefore, there is no prospect of early agreement within the Council on the Community's proposals before the House. A new proposal on food aid for Bulgaria and Romania is expected shortly. In view of that, a debate next week or in the near future on the precise question of aid would be premature.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): My right hon. Friend has already given an answer about our

prisoners of war, about whom we are all worried. Will he make sure that, at the end of the Gulf war, atrocities and ill treatment of other prisoners of war and civilians are brought to trial and brought to the notice of the public?

Mr. MacGregor: That matter does not relate to the business of the House, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's views are conveyed to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that next week a Standing Committee will sit on Tuesday and Thursday to consider the Atomic Weapons Establishments Bill? The Committee began its proceedings this morning. Is he aware that the Government are denying members of that Committee access to certain reports which they need to do their job? We hear about human rights; I am talking about hon. Members' rights. I want the right hon. Gentleman to do something about it. Let us hear from that Dispatch Box that he will do something about it.

Mr. MacGregor: The first thing that I shall have to do about it is look into it. I am not aware of it at present.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Notwithstanding the urgent business announced for next week, will my right hon. Friend find time next week—I stress, next week—to allow the House to discuss the Civil Aviation Authority advice on the traffic distribution rules for the south-east of England? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that there is enormous pressure on my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to take a decision on that advice before the end of the month. It is far from merely a constituency interest. If there were a free-for-all at Heathrow airport among airlines, it would affect a huge number of people in the Heathrow area and have a knock-on effect for every hon. Member who has any aviation interest whatever. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that the House gives its views to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport before he makes that urgent decision?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. and learned Friend has received and is studying carefully the CAA advice on London air traffic distribution. I understand that he intends to reach a decision as soon as possible. I am sure that my hon. Friend and others who have an interest in the matter will convey their views to him.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): What about having a debate on the multi-fibre agreement? Does the Leader of the House remember that we were due to have a debate on it in November and lost it? There was a debate on the GATT negotiations, but most of that was taken up with agricultural matters. It is high time that hon. Members from textiles areas had an opportunity to air their views on the MFA.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman said, the matter could have been raised in the debate on the Uruguay round and GATT just before Christmas. There will be an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to raise it in the debate next week, if he so wishes. In view of the pressures on the timetable, I doubt that it will be possible to have a debate on that specific issue in the near future.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): May we have an early debate on the co-ordination of agricultural and environmental policies in the light of widespread support in both the farming and environmentalist communities for a single national comprehensive scheme to encourage green farming? Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a proposal to give the region of the Blackdown hills, in my constituency, area of outstanding natural beauty status? In the light of the Government's disappointment when they asked the European Commission to give that district less favoured area status, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), myself and other hon. Members will support the extension of environmentally sensitive area status in that region.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to be careful not to engage in a long reply to my hon. Friend—he will be aware that I was much involved in those matters. He will also know that the Government have taken the lead, both in the United Kingdom and in the European Community, in bringing together many agricultural and environmental policies that are in the interests of the countryside as a whole. There are many opportunities to raise general matters, but I cannot promise an early debate in Government time on the specific issues concerning my hon. Friend's county. He will have to seek other ways of pressing the point.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House announced that on Wednesday we shall debate two Orders in Council for Northern Ireland. One of them might be minor and consequential, but the other one is major, dealing with the reorganisation of the health service in Northern Ireland. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that we shall have ample time to discuss that order and that the debate will not be curtailed to an hour and a half? This seems to be a further example of Northern Ireland, as part of the nation, being governed worse than a colony.

Mr. MacGregor: I note the hon. Member's request. It would be for the general convenience of the House to debate the orders together. I shall consider the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. John Marshall: (Hendon, South): When does my right hon. Friend expect to be able to announce the Second Reading of the War Crimes Bill? Does he agree that, if we are not going to prosecute Iraqi war criminals, we should be willing to prosecute those war criminals who are resident in the United Kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot say at this stage, but it will not be next week.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House have a look at the early-day motions dealing with democracy in Kuwait, bearing in mind the fact that the Crown Prince and the royal family of Kuwait are gallivanting round the casino dens and racecourses in Europe—one of them has a private plane that sends him food from Harrods several times a week—while British soldiers look like being slaughtered in the desert? Is that not——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Did not the hon. Gentleman hear me say that business questions should be confined to what is happening next week and should not relate to general matters?

Mr. Skinner: We ask business questions about what is happening next week and what we want to happen next week.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member must ask for a debate.

Mr. Skinner: Absolutely. There are three early-day motions on the Order Paper dealing with the need for a debate about the lack of democracy in Kuwait and the fact that the Crown Princes are running the country without any democracy. One of those princes has a private plane sending food from Harrods several times a week while British troops are being slaughtered. Many other members of the royal family are at gambling dens, casinos and racecourses, and will not even put on a uniform to fight for their own country.

Mr. MacGregor: The aims for which the British forces are currently engaged, as part of the allied forces in the Gulf and in enforcing a United Nations resolution, have been debated in the House on numerous occasions. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others have made clear what those aims are.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on London? In previous Parliaments, we had an annual debate on London. We have the only capital city without an elected government, with an unsatisfactory cat's cradle of unaccountable quangos and Government Departments to run the city, and there is no proper democratic oversight of our affairs. This should be debated in the House. Could the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot now promise an opportunity for debating the subject in Government time, but the hon. Member will know that there is a considerable number of other opportunities available to him and his hon. Friends to raise the matter in the House if they wish to do so.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The Leader of the House heard the reply that the Prime Minister gave to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who asked whether service men serving in the Gulf, especially from RAF Leuchars, would be relieved of the poll tax. The Prime Minister said that there was already provision for this. I know that the right hon. Gentleman would not deliberately mislead the House, but, regrettably, I must tell the Leader of the House that that reply was not accurate.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It might not be, but could the hon. Member ask for a debate next week?

Mr. Ewing: Against that background, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Scotland to come to the House next week and explain where in the legislation implementing the poll tax for Scotland there is provision to relieve service men of paying poll tax? As that is so important, I would even settle for a reply to a planted question.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In view of the debate that the Leader of the House has announced for next Tuesday night, on the revenue support grant formulas for England and for Wales, will he confirm that they will be relatively narrow debates and will not take in the broad purview of what the Secretary of State for the Environment intends to do with the community charge? That is of considerable importance, because the tax is enormously unpopular. If that is the case, can the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on the broad direction of Government thinking about the future of this charge, so that other ideas can be taken on board at an early stage before conclusions are reached?

Mr. MacGregor: My righ hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has already made it clear that he is prepared to take on other ideas, and he is engaged in discussion on this with minority parties and others. It is not necessary to have a debate to achieve that purpose. I confirm that the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the debate next week will be confined to the revenue support grant orders. Nevertheless, it is a major issue and one on which many hon. Members would wish to speak. Therefore, it is right to give a whole day to the debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): What arrangements have been made for the Home Secretary to make a statement next week so that we can make to him the point that, while every effort must be made to protect the country from terrorism, certainly by those acting at the behest of the criminals in Baghdad, every effort should also be made to protect the innocent? Is the Leader of the House aware that some of us are worried, recognising as we do the matters involving national security, that long-standing opponents of Saddam Hussein, some of whom have fled from his terror, could be in danger of being deported? This matter requires a statement from the Home Secretary.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. He will know that there is a procedure for allowing three visitors to examine individual cases if there is an appeal to them, and that allows all aspects to be examined. I know that hon. Members are taking up some cases directly with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I do not know whether this is necessarily a matter for a general statement next week, but I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week about the question of compensation for nuclear test veterans? He will know that I have raised the case of my constituent John Hall who is dying of leukaemia and who, on Thursday of this week, had a blood transfusion. If the Government take a long time to sort out the question, some of the veterans who are claiming compensation may not be alive to hear the news.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that this matter has been raised in the House on a number of occasions. I see no possibility of a debate next week.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to make a statement next week on the proposed closure of the SERC nuclear structure facility at the Daresbury laboratories in Warrington? Does he realise that it is the leader in this field and closure of it will affect research not only at Daresbury but at many universities? It will also affect the Eurogam programme, in which we are engaged in conjunction with the French. Does he realise that this facility is closing despite—or because of—a visit earlier this year by the former Prime Minister, the right

hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)? The right hon. Lady had assured many other plants that they were leaders in their field and had a future.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend. I do not think, however, that it merits a full statement next week.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a statement next week on the breaches of the embargo on the supply of arms to Iraq? I am thinking particularly of German firms and of weapons for use in chemical and biological warfare. This is a very serious matter. Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that arms manufacturers are licking their lips in anticipation of pumping into various countries yet more billions of weapons that carry the tag "Gulf tested"? Would not that be an odious affront to the troops who are risking their lives in the field? Is it not time for the Government to provide some procedures to stop the odious arms trade after this conflict so that such a thing is unlikely to happen again?

Mr. MacGregor: There are many opportunities to raise issues of that sort. Indeed, one such issue was raised this afternoon. I do not think that there is a case for a specific statement next week.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May we have next week a debate on the conduct of the press? I hope that the Leader of the House has had an opportunity to read the *Official Report* of last night's Adjournment debate, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) raised the question of the obscene campaign against her by the *News of the World* and, in the past, by *The Sun*. Those of us who, whilst dedicating ourselves to the welfare of British troops in the Gulf, have called for peace initiatives have been branded by one of the gutter newspapers as "treacherous swine". May we have an early debate so that it may be made quite clear to newspaper editors, especially at this time, that in a democracy those who take a contrary stand do not deserve to have their private lives crawled over by nasty journalists or to be branded as traitors when they stand as squarely as anybody else in support of our troops in the Gulf?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman has said, there was a debate last night on certain aspects of this matter. As for his second point, although I totally disagree with his general views on the Gulf, I happily reaffirm that it is essential to our parliamentary democracy that hon. Members are able to express their views freely.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May we have next week a statement about procurement policy in relation to British forces serving in the Gulf? I put this question on behalf of a constituent of mine who has two sons serving there with the British Army. He was greatly distressed when he received from one of his sons a letter saying:

"The boots we have been issued with are useless. They are too short, and the sand gets in the top of them, giving us foot problems. Could you buy me a pair and send them over?" At the weekend that father spent £60 on boots to send to his two sons.

I have been in contact with the Ministry of Defence and have spoken to a senior Minister twice this week. The Minister confirmed that there is a problem. Proper desert boots are now being sent to the Gulf. This House and those who are related to people serving in the Gulf have a right to ask why is it that desert boots were not available from day one. Why is it necessary for our boys in the Gulf to buy proper boots privately? Are all those who need proper desert boots now in possession of them?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously I cannot comment on the individual issue to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, as I do not know the details or the background. Members of Parliament have other means of pursuing these matters, as, indeed, the hon. Gentleman did. This is just the sort of subject on which it would not be appropriate to make a statement every day. Indeed, it is the kind of case that I had in mind when I said that it would not be right to debate daily particular aspects of the Gulf. If the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly, I hope he will reconsider the decision he took when he voted earlier this week.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Why are the Government so severely curtailing opportunities to debate the Gulf war? Is it not disgraceful that since the war broke out we have had only a single day's debate on it? Is the Leader of the House seriously proposing to the House this afternoon that not one day of Government business next week will be allocated to a debate on the Gulf war?

Mr. MacGregor: I utterly reject the view that we have been depriving the House of the opportunity to discuss these matters. We have had two debates within a short period, we have had a number of statements and private notice questions, and we have had Question Time. I have made it clear that we are happy to keep the House fully informed and will make statements as appropriate, and that may well be the case next week. But I do not think that it is the mood of the House at the moment that we should have a debate on the issue every week. We must judge as and when the need arises, but I stress again that, as I think most hon. Members recognise, we are making every effort to keep the House fully informed and to debate the issues.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I welcome the prospect of food aid to Romania and Bulgaria, but surely we should have a full-scale debate on the effect that the Gulf war has had on countries such as those? I refer in particular to the wretched winter which is being suffered now by Bulgaria's people, who are without adequate fuel, heating and other essentials of life. It is about time that the United Kingdom provided help to those countries, particularly as Bulgaria's miseries have been brought about entirely because of its robust support of the embargo that we asked it to join us in imposing.

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly we cannot have debates every week on a number of major issues that concern all of us. That just is not possible. But I recognise the hon. and learned Gentleman's anxiety about the matter and, as I said earlier, a new proposal on food aid for Bulgaria and Romania is expected shortly.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): May we have a debate next week, or at the very least a statement, so that the Home Secretary can explain to the House on what grounds he has authorised the deportation of my constituent, Mr. Abbas Cheblak, a respected campaigner for human rights in Iraq and throughout the middle east, a known pacifist, who has lived here for 16 years and who has two children of British nationality? The Home Secretary has refused to speak to me by telephone and has refused a meeting with me on the subject.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that farm incomes in the livestock sector have now reached the lowest level since the second world war which, allied to rising costs, will lead to a brutal restructuring of the industry through bankruptcy? Will the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at least make a statement to the House; or at best, given the troubles which affect every sector of agriculture, may we have a full-scale and urgent debate on the future of British agriculture?

Mr. MacGregor: We had agriculture questions this afternoon, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend made the point then that he is about to embark on discussions on possible Community proposals in relation to agriculture. I understand that no specific proposals have been put forward yet, only some tentative ideas about what they might be, and the Council of Ministers will be meeting again shortly—I think the week after next—to discuss those matters. We need to keep in mind when would be an appropriate time for a statement or a debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House speak urgently to the Home Secretary on the matters raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)? The situation is extremely serious. A large number of people of Palestinian or Iraqi background have been taken into custody, held for up to 19 hours a day in cells, denied proper recreational or visiting facilities and now, we hear yesterday, have been denied the right of legal appeal other than through an internal tribunal.

Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House on the number of people who have been taken into custody and why, and also why he is refusing to meet hon. Members who wish to represent their constituents in this serious matter at a serious time? Civil liberties are at stake.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it clear that there are clear procedures for dealing with such matters, and the majority of people would feel that it was right for the Home Secretary to be taking the action that he is taking. I have already said that I will draw the points raised to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Economic and Monetary Union

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on 25th July 1990 on Enonomic and Monetary Union (House of Commons Paper No. 620 of Session 1989-90).

European Community Document SEC (90) 1659 on economic and monetary union and the unnumbered explanatory memoranda, submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 23rd April and 5th November 1990, describing Commission reports on the economic rationale and design of economic and monetary union and the potential benefits and costs of economic and monetary union.

Government's proposed treaty provisions for economic and monetary union—beyond stage 1, published on 8th January 1991].

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn *[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, may I say that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in this important debate? I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock, but I ask right hon. and hon. Members who are called before then to bear that limit in mind.

4.14 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): Questions of monetary union, parallel currrencies, the hard ecu, economic convergence and the European monetary fund may sound deeply impenetrable and technical but they are none the less matters of profound economic, political and constitutional importance to the House.

This Parliament has a deep and legitimate interest in the issues raised by economic and monetary union. That is one reason why the Government have made it plain to our European partners that we cannot accept any changes to the treaty of Rome which would bind us to move to a single currency or a single monetary policy without a separate decision by the United Kingdom Government and Parliament. That will be a question that only future Parliaments can decide. That was the position expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) the former Prime Minister, and it remains the policy of the Government today.

I should like, if I may, to set out to the House first, what our proposals are; and secondly, the arrangements for the organisation of the intergovernmental conference for European monetary union, EMU. Thirdly, I should like to go over again some of our reservations about the plans put forward by Mr. Delors.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): We have before us a clutch of documents, as detailed on the Order Paper. Indeed, a large number of issues are covered. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why, given the obvious relevance, we do not have before us the Commission's draft treaty on economic and montary union, dated 15 December 1990? It is by far the most authoritative and up-to-date version of what the Commission proposes and what most or our European partners are likely to accept. In addition, why do we not have the draft statute for the European system of central banks and of the European central bank, sent to the intergovernmental conference by the committee of central bank governors on 27 November?

Those are the most definitive documents, yet they are excluded from the clutch of documents to which the attention of the House has been drawn. Can the Chancellor explain?

Mr. Lamont: Those documents are important to the debate, and I shall certainly be talking about them.

To go back to the point which I was making, the impetus for European monetary union dates back to the 1960s. The Werner report of 1970 set out a three-stage process for greater economic and monetary integration. That was never implemented because, to be frank, the economies of member states were not remotely ready for it.

However, the Delors committee's report two years ago revived the issue and brought it to the forefront of the European debate. The report defined EMU as a once-and-for-all locking of exchange rates, leading to the adoption of a single currency, with a single monetary policy and a single European bank; and it set out a three-stage process to get there, laying down strict conditions which would first need to be met.

Much of what was defined as stage 1 by the report was very welcome to the Government. Indeed, in some areas we have led the way. They include the completion of the single market and a single financial area, free movement of capital throughout the Community and a strengthened competition policy. All these steps continue the process of economic integration by which both the Community and the United Kingdom economy have benefited greatly over the past two decades. Monetary integration at this stage is merely the logical development of the single market.

But we part company with the Delors report over its centralising, prescriptive approach to developments beyond stage 1, especially the proposal that 12 member states, in their current state of economic development, should commit themselves today to move to a single European currency. The Government believe that it would be wrong to make such a commitment. Profound issues of sovereignty are involved, and apart from that the Community is a very long way from being ready for a single currency, as I shall explain to the House in due course. It would be foolish to bind ourselves now to a rigid, inflexible structure for monetary union when there are huge uncertainties about what lies ahead.

We believe that the right way forward is to build on our experience of economic and monetary integration to date, and to take the practical steps that we can all agree on towards closer integration. In our view, monetary union should not be equated with a single currency; it is a process. As we go further down this road, our experience will increase and we shall be better able to take decisions about the future. But we should not try to prejudge questions to which we cannot possible know the answers today.

The British Government have therefore concentrated on the immediate steps beyond stage 1. They were the first Government to put forward proposals for stage 2, and these remain the only substantive proposals for stage 2. The proposals involve the creation not of a single but of a common currency; that is to say, a currency that would exist alongside or parallel with national currencies rather than replace them. This common currency, the so-called hard ecu, would be a genuine, new, international currency. The ecu would no longer be, as it is now, a basket of other currencies—that is to say, a weighted average—but would exist in its own right and be a currency within the ERM. It is called the "hard" ecu because it would never be allowed to devalue against other Community currencies and would therefore be an attractive store of value for use by businesses and individuals across the Community. Banks would be able to take deposits and issue loans in this currency.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I am obliged to my right hon. Friend for giving way and I am listening with care to what he says. He has just said that the intention was that the common currency would not be allowed to devalue against individual state currencies. If it is intended at some stage in the future that each of our national currencies will be relatively fixed to a new common currency, surely the two will become interchangeable, and the difference between "common currency" and "single currency" will be essentially semantic.

Mr. Lamont: With great respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), that does not follow. What would follow is that the hard ecu would be the hardest currency within the mechanism, and if one currency was revaluing upwards all the time it would become more like that currency, because it is, as I said, not a weighted average as is the existing basket. So I do not think that it carries one forward inevitably in the way described by my hon. Friend.

In the first instance, the hard ecu would be used largely for business purposes and for financial transactions, although it might also have attractions for individuals as a store of value. As a result, the hard ecu could, over time, evolve towards a single currency. But that, as we have always made clear, is a decision not for now but for the future, and one that would be debated fully in the House.

At the same time we would create a new institution, the European monetary fund. It would be responsible for issuing the new currency in exchange for national currencies; and it would be responsible for operating in the money markets, setting hard ecu interest rates. Both the hard ecu and the European monetary fund would come into being at the start of stage 2.

Our proposals have stimulated debate about the alternative of a common as opposed to a single currency. Opposition Members have tried to ridicule our proposals, but they have attracted an increasing amount of interest in Europe. For instance, Mr. Beregovoy, the French Finance Minister, said recently:

> "It would be better to increase progressively the credibility of the ecu rather than to bring it in by decree on the first day of stage 3. I approve entirely of the idea of an ecu whose definition will be strengthened and whose use on the markets will be developed."

These wise words echo our own approach, but Mr. Beregovoy has not been alone. Other countries have expressed interest and Spain has incorporated something very similar in its own plans for stage 2. The chief executive of the Federation of German Industry, the equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry, Herr von Wartenberg, described them as

> "An interesting alternative to the rather more centralist approach in the Delors report",

and said that they

> "should therefore be examined free of bias."

This growing interest is not surprising, because our proposals have a number of district advantages. First, they provide a way in which all 12 countries can move together

[Mr. Lamont]

as a Community. Secondly, they provide for the creation of a genuinely European currency and a European monetary institution at the beginning of this process.

Thirdly, they reinforce the pressures in the ERM for all member states to converge on the lowest inflation rate in the Community. If a Government depreciate their own currency, they might find that businesses were turning increasingly to the hard ecu. As the hard ecu would not be permitted to devalue within the ERM and the monetary fund would set interest rates to achieve that, it would therefore provide a secure anchor for the other ERM currencies.

Our proposals would work with the market, allowing individuals and firms to use the common currency, in the form of the hard ecu, whenever they wanted to do so, but it would not be forced upon them. Nonetheless, our experience with the existing ecu suggests that a common European currency could have considerable attractions. The Institute of Directors has said that it believes that the introduction of the hard ecu as a common currency

"would be of immediate benefit to business and individual travellers".

We do not plan to grant the hard ecu legal tender status in the first instance. Nonetheless, as we have made clear, if, over time, people saw advantages in that, the Government could consider it.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Would my right hon. Friend say why he does not envisage that the hard ecu will be given legal tender status?

Mr. Lamont: I do not think that that is necessary. As I am sure my hon. Friend knows, legal tender is a highly complex subject. I am sure that it will not surprise my hon. Friend, as he is well informed in this matter, but all the notes in circulation in this country do not come within the definition of legal tender. The currency could evolve and could be used increasingly without that legal change. As I said, there could—as opposed to would—come a point when it might be considered.

I have outlined our proposals and why we believe that they represent the best way forward. Now the business of negotiation with our partners in the Community is under way, and I should like to explain to the House how the intergovernmental conference will be organised, and set out the approach that we intend to take in discussions and our objectives during the months ahead.

The conference has been called to amend the treaty in order to facilitate the later stages of EMU. The agenda is decided by the IGC itself. Ministerial meetings—at which I or the Financial Secretary will represent the United Kingdom—will take place once a month, with officials meeting once a fortnight. I attended the opening session of the IGC last month, and the next ministerial meeting will take place in four days' time.

The conference will be chaired by the presidency—the Luxemburgers in the first half of 1991 and the Dutch in the second half. We shall keep the House in touch with progress as the conference continues. No date has been set for the conclusion of the conference, but at the European Council in Dublin last April it was agreed that member states should ratify treaty amendments by the end of 1992.

The opening session last month was encouraging. Every member state expressed its wish for the IGC to reach an agreement acceptable to all 12 members. We agreed that the main objective should be price stability. On other issues, such as the need to avoid excessive budget deficits, we also found a lot of common ground.

Of course, there are several issues on which the positions of member states differ substantially. That is hardly surprising when one considers the huge complexity of this subject and the uncertainty that there must be about the consequences of EMU. But the gap between us is not unbridgeable. As Finance Ministers get down to the detailed, practical negotiations that are required to make progress, I am confident that problems can be resolved constructively. Far too much of the debate in the Community so far has focused on the abstraction of a single currency, but I am glad to say that discussion is now turning towards the immediate practical issues of what we do next. It is clear that the United Kingdom has been instrumental in influencing that change of direction.

Earlier this month I made available to the House texts for treaty amendments which showed how our proposals could be framed in treaty language, and how the European monetary fund would operate. These have been tabled for discussion at the intergovernmental conference. If we compare our texts with the Commission's, it can be seen that there are clearly some differences and some similarities between the aims and operations of the fund and the proposed European central bank.

We differ on the imposition of a single monetary policy and a single currency, which this Government cannot accept and have not provided for in our proprosals. The European monetary fund is not put forward as a central bank, for the very simple reason that we do not favour a single currency. The function and purpose of a central bank is to issue a single currency. We agree with the Commission on the need for the new monetary institution in the Community to have a two-tier structure of governing and executive boards. Therefore, we have incorporated those provisions in our treaty texts which are along the lines of those proposed for the European central bank. The texts are designed specifically to meet two of the main worries that have been expressed about a common currency.

The first worry has been that a common or parallel currency might prove inflationary. As the argument goes, it might add to the money supply of the Community. As I have explained on several occasions, our proposals are designed to avoid that drawback and indeed to operate specifically as a counter-inflationary discipline. The European monetary fund's operations would not add to the Community's money supply because any hard ecus issued would have to be exchanged for national currencies. Anything that the fund added to the total money supply in the Community would be matched by what it took out.

In addition, the EMF would have powers to discourage national Governments from pursuing loose monetary policies. If a Government printed too much money and businesses and individuals came to believe that national currencies were losing their value, they would be able to exchange them for the new currency. The monetary fund would begin to build up an excessive stock of national currency and beyond a certain limit would require the national Government to repurchase it out of its reserves. That would directly counteract the excessive growth in money supply and would be a heavy penalty on the country in question.

The second worry has been that the creation of a 13th currency would somehow confuse responsibility for

monetary policy. Our proposals provide a clear division of responsibilities. The job of the EMF would be to manage the new currency, preventing it from ever devaluing against other Community currencies. National monetary policy would remain in the hands of national Governments with decisions taken at national level.

Now that we are in negotiation, we shall be arguing for our proposals but also seeking the views of other member states on specific questions where we have not yet taken a firm decision—for instance, how the monetary fund might best be made accountable to Finance Ministers, national Parliaments, and perhaps also to the European Parliament. This is a subject on which there is a wide range of views held among the other member states and many of the views held by other states will not be easily reconcilable with each other. The same may be true in regard to hon. Members on both sides of the House. The monetary fund would be a new institution, and it is by no means obvious how we could best ensure its accountability, so we shall listen with care to the ideas and views expressed by our partners, as well as those advanced during today's debate.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the wide divergence of view among hon. Members of all parties and, indeed, throughout the country. Can he tell us whether the Cabinet now has an ultimate goal? We hear a good deal of Euro-speak about commonality, convergence, gradualism and unity. Where is all that unity going to lead us? What is the Government's ultimate goal?

Mr. Lamont: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's feelings about Euro-speak and jargon, although I fear that a certain amount of such language is unavoidable. I have at least tried to explain what each word means when I have used it for the first time, but it is almost impossible to make a speech Matthew Parris-proof.

Our objective is to leave the realisation of monetary union, if it happens, to an evolutionary approach to be determined by markets, individuals and businesses. We are not prepared to sign up to move to a single currency with a single central bank; our objective is to negotiate that outcome successfully.

Mr. Shore: I promise not to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman a third time.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he thought it possible to reconcile our proposals, which he has described, with the approach of the majority of the Community partners who are now meeting, or about to meet, in the IGC. He also told the House very clearly that we could not accept any commitment to a single currency at this stage. Article 2 of the draft treaty of the Commission—the first substantive article in the treaty, which I wish were among the papers before us—states:

"The Community shall have as its task progressively to achieve economic and monetary union, which will be based on a single currency, the ecu".

Is that article to be deleted from the draft treaty, or are we discussing complete unrealities—measures that we consider sensible, but on which the Community has already made its decision, with the aim of going much further?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman is referring to the Commission's proposals. I am talking about an intergovernmental conference at which both we and the Commission will present proposals, and at which we shall negotiate. We are trying to get our objectives embodied in treaty amendments. In due course, there will be other texts from the French, and, I believe, from the Spanish and the Belgians as well. There will be a good deal of cross-party and intergovernmental discussion about the different ways in which different amendments may be reconciled: that is what the conference is all about.

Now that we are in negotiation, we shall be arguing for our proposals, but also—as I have said—seeking the views of other member states about specific questions on which we have not yet taken a firm view, such as the accountability of the European monetary fund. Let me make it plain, however, that a willingness to discuss and adapt our proposals does not mean that we have modified or abandoned our concern about a single currency: we are not about to withdraw the objections that we have expressed all along to the original Delors proposals.

Our overall objective for the IGC is twofold—to reach an agreement with our partners, but one that meets our own concerns by fully respecting the sovereign rights of this Parliament. That means keeping open the options not just for this Parliament, but for future Parliaments. We shall be looking for a treaty that does not impose a single currency on the United Kingdom; for developments beyond stage 1, which incorporate our ideas for a common European currency and for a European monetary fund; and for continued national responsibility for the main elements of budgetary policy.

The Delors report recommends setting binding rules on the size of budget deficits which member states would be allowed to run. This would mean that the House of Commons would no longer be sovereign on matters of taxation or public expenditure or both—a position that we could not accept. That objection aside, binding rules are neither necessary nor practical; excessive budget deficits are certainly something that we should try to avoid, but how that is done and what constitutes an excessive deficit can be judged only on a case by case basis.

National Governments can and should be left to make those decisions within the disciplines created by the financial markets. Those disciplines will be effective provided that the markets know that Governments are on their own; there is no Community guarantee of their debt and that they will not be bailed out by the Community if they get into trouble. All that is required to make that plain is a rule against financing the deficit by printing money and an explicit prohibition of bail-outs by the Community. On this key issue, I am pleased to report, we are among a clear majority in the Community.

One might ask what approach the opposition would take to EMU and to negotiations with our partners? Hon. Members on this side of the House will not be alone if they are somewhat unclear about the Labour party's policy, and not least, as usual, about the approach by the Leader of the Opposition himself. On 2 November last year, the Leader of the Opposition explained to the listeners of the "Today" programme what accepting a single currency meant to him. He said:

"You don't have to have the abolition of the pound; you have a pound with its ecu value and everybody can go on using whatever currency they want so long as it is in stipulated ecu value."

When asked whether it mattered if we had a common or single currency "so long as the Queen's head is on it", the right hon. Member beamed:

"That's the whole point Leon Brittan and Jacques Delors and everybody else has made and they're right".

[Mr. Lamont]

As usual, it was the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who set about the damage limitation exercise, as he so often has to. On 7 November he told *The Daily Telegraph*:

"What Neil was trying to make clear was that it was rather a foolish view to say the only issue was whether the Queen's head appeared on the currency or not".

That was a heroic, but slightly unconvincing, attempt, to save the day.

In November, Labour's national executive committee published a paper entitled "The Intergovernmental Conference on Economic and Monetary Union". This states that, since our Community partners have made clear that their desire is to move towards full monetary union and the establishment of a single currency, Labour believes that

"it would not be in the national interest if Britain allowed itself to be excluded from such developments".

In December, in another interview on "Today", his favourite programme, the Leader of the Opposition said:

"The 11 other countries are unanimous"—

about their desire for greater economic and monetary integration—

"Now the choices therefore available are to go and turn our backs on that, which would be foolish, or to be involved in it."

I do not wish to be unfair to the Labour party, but it is not being at all clear. I put it no more strongly than this: the implication seems to be that the Labour party would be prepared to sign up to a single currency if sufficient of the other members of the Community think that that is a good idea. I very much hope that when the right hon. and learned Gentleman speaks on this matter he will make his position crystal clear.

Our position is that we will not commit ourselves to move to a single currency. Our proposals are designed to safeguard Britain's interests. Other countries are interested in our proposals, but the task of persuading our partners is a difficult one. It is not always made easier by the Leader of the Opposition denouncing our proposals when he is abroad. We do not hear of President Giscard d'Estaing coming to this country and criticising his country's proposals; he stands up for French interests.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the question of the single currency and the hard ecu, would he simplify one basic point which I think I understand correctly. The hard ecu is not a transitional arrangement and the Governnment do not ever wish to move to a single currency. Is that the approach?

Mr. Lamont: I have already made it clear this afternoon that the hard ecu could evolve if markets and individuals want that. That would be a decision to be made by a future parliament and a future Government. This Government reserve decisions on moving to a single currency for this House. Opposition Members seem to be prepared to rush headlong into agreements in Europe without having a clear idea of what these will mean for Britain and without the slightest regard for the sovereignty of Parliament.

Unlike the Opposition, the Government have always objected to the Delors prescription for EMU and the imposition of a single currency, and we will continue to oppose it. Let us just consider what the proposal would mean. Overnight, 340 million people would accept a single currency in a Community in which income per head varies from £9,400 in Germany to £4,500 in Greece.

Income is only one way of measuring the diversity of economies in Europe. Let us consider, for example, the following differences between member states: inflation ranges from 2 per cent. to 23 per cent; short-term interest rates are 9 per cent. at the bottom end and 19 per cent. at the top; unemployment, an important indicator of labour market flexibility, ranges from 1 per cent. in Luxembourg to 16 per cent. in Spain; and budget balances range from a surplus of 3 per cent. to a deficit of 19 per cent. of gross domestic product. As long as such wide divergences exist, a commitment now to move to a single currency would be a massive leap in the dark.

By trying to move prematurely to monetary union, we would run very serious risks. The dangers of forcing the pace have been amply demonstrated in Germany. Karl Otto Pöhl, the director of the Bundesbank, has described Germany's experience as "a drastic object lesson" of the need for prior convergence before establishing a currency union. Reunification there has meant the rapid merger of two very different economies. The short-term consequences are a huge rise in the German budget deficit and rising unemployment in eastern Germany, but for the rest of the Community their experience is salutary. It shows the strains and tensions set up by moving to currency union before there is proper economic convergence. In the case of Germany one strong currency and one strong economy effectively took over those of a weaker neighbour. How much greater would those strains and tensions be if 12 very different states with different economies were now to adopt a single currency?

The consequences could be very difficult indeed. It is possible that to ease the pain of currency union, there would be calls for large sums to be spent in the poorer regions. A programme of transfers—potentially huge—would be very difficult for the more prosperous countries to take. Even on present policies, by 1993 we will be funding a structural policy costing between £11 billion and £12 billion each year.

A second possible outcome is that the European central bank would prove unable to live up to the high standards of the Bundesbank in reducing inflation. Instead of promoting convergence, monetary union would lead to just the opposite: higher inflation and a poorer economic performance. The truth is that the full economic consequences of the Delors prescription are highly uncertain. They would take a long time to emerge and would be extremely difficult to forecast. The currency union on this scale of individual countries envisaged has no serious precedent that I have been able to find. Fixed exchange rate systems like the gold standard, Bretton Woods and, indeed, the EMS are not the real precursors of EMU. A common feature of all those arrangements was that there was no centralised monetary policy and no single central bank governing all the participants.

It is for those reasons that we have put forward our own proposals, which recognise the uncertainties involved. We want to listen to our partners at the IGC and to try to find ways of meeting their concerns as well as our own. We hope and expect that the IGC will recommend a set of treaty amendments acceptable to all member states which we can bring to this House for approval.

At the same time, we cannot accept a treaty that would bind us to move to a single currency or to a single

continental monetary policy without a separate decision at the appropriate time by the United Kingdom Government and Parliament. That will be a question for future Parliaments to decide.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all the talk of monetary union at so early a stage is a real danger to the completion of the internal market, which is a real thing that people—and certainly business people—want to see happen? In Europe, it takes weeks to transfer money, whereas in our own market it is instantaneous. Such hurdles and obstacles have to be overcome. That is more important and practical than dreaming about monetary union which, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, cannot take place here.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend has a good point. Many aspects of the single market still have to be developed. Our financial institutions and insurance companies feel strongly that we do not yet have an internal market in many areas of financial services. I should have thought that that was relevant to the debate on monetary union.

This debate will show that economic and monetary union raises issues of the greatest importance for this country. There are those in the Community who seem ready to bind themselves to make the move to a single monetary policy and a single currency. As we have made clear, while we are ready to respond to the other member states in the Community, we believe it both unnecessary and premature to ask this House to take binding decisions to move to a single currency.

We have said that our approach, or some development of it, could lead to a single currency. Although we do not rule out a single currency for ever—if that were what peoples and Governments so wished—we cannot accept a commitment to move to a single currency or a single monetary policy without a separate decision at the appropriate time by this House. It is on that basis that we will carry forward our negotiations in the intergovernmental conference.

In the light of those assurances, I ask the House to commend the Government's approach to these complex issues and, especially, our emphasis on practical steps which will promote economic and monetary convergence. I also ask the House to endorse the Government's handling of the intergovernmental conference that lies ahead.

4.53 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Despite what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his closing sentences, this is a debate on the Adjournment. We are not asked to commend anything; we are asked to make contributions to the debate. It is understandable that the House, like the nation, has other things on its mind this week. However, our natural tendency to concentrate on the Gulf should not lead us to neglect the proper duty of Parliament to scrutinise the actions of Government on other major issues, or to underestimate the importance of this subject.

The debate also offers the opportunity for hon. Members of all parties, and with a wide variety of views on what the future economic and monetary relationships in the European Community should be, to contribute to a discussion that seems now to be firmly under way in the intergovernmental conference. I stress the importance of the issue because there has been a tendency in our country over the years to fail to appreciate the significance of issues as they emerge in the continuing debate in the European Community about its future.

In the 1950s, successive British Governments made the wrong assessment about the potential and eventual reality of the early moves to found the European Community. It was too easily—and perhaps too comfortably—assumed that the enterprise either would not succeed, or would not achieve the ambitions set for it. There was similar scepticism—and not only among politicians—about the potential success of the European monetary system when it was established at the end of the 1970s.

Those experiences should teach us that there are penalties to be paid for failing to assess the serious purport of developments in the Community, and then belatedly trying to influence the shape of institutions and the direction of policy after key decisions have been taken without our participation. It would be wise for us to appreciate that the move towards economic and monetary union is solidly based and widely supported by the majority of the Community.

No one can predict the outcome of the current negotiations. There is no inevitability about the early adoption of a radical move to a single currency throughout the whole Community. As the Chancellor noted, a previous attempt after the publication of the Werner report at the beginning of the 1970s did not lead to monetary union, although the debate helped to promote the establishment of the European monetary system.

On the other hand, the creation of the single market after 1992, which is now irreversibly in process, gives an impetus to the consideration of economic and monetary union that was not there before. For those reasons, it would be profoundly wrong for this country not to be engaged fully and constructively in the discussions and debates now under way at the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I have hardly said anything, but I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Oppenheim: I appreciate the right hon. and learned Gentleman's courtesy.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman correctly made the point that it is important, first, to have a clear negotiating position and, secondly, to ensure that our position is heard in Europe. Bearing that in mind, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make his own position clear by telling the House unequivocally whether he is in favour of a single currency—yes or no?

Mr. Smith: I was slightly reluctant to give way to the hon. Gentleman as I had hardly embarked on my speech. If he listens with attention to my speech, when I can begin to deliver it, he may benefit from what he hears.

In the discussions, we should seek to ensure that the results are not incompatible with our national interest or with the reality of our economic situation—bad as it is—and we should also seek, as a member of the Community, to bring our own distinctive experience, especially our concepts of political accountability and democracy, to bear on some of the crucial issues that will be encountered in the intergovernmental discussions.

[Mr. Smith]

Given our experience of joining the European Community and the exchange rate mechanism late in the day, there would be perils in not appreciating the strength of the movement, especially towards monetary union, or in underestimating the potentially adverse consequences in the United Kingdom being outwith the form of monetary union that the majority of the Community would have established.

In the light of those observations, one of the questions to be considered is whether the Government's approach to recent developments in the Community is sufficiently realistic and constructive. Is it realistic about what is likely to happen in the Community and about asserting our national interest? Is it constructive in the sense that negotiations are being conducted straightforwardly and with a sense of contributing purposefully to the debate?

The Government's early response to the Delors report, especially when it was articulated by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the former Chancellor of the Exchequer but one, was totally dismissive. Once it became clear that there was a real impetus behind the initiative, if not behind all the details in the report, the former Prime Minister announced at the Madrid summit in 1989 that there would be a British alternative to Delors. The fact that her Chancellor was not present at the summit added, no doubt, to the Treasury's surprise when the bold new move was announced.

In the Lombard column of the *Financial Times* on 18 September 1989, Mr. Sam Brittan, a usually well-informed source, described matters thus:

"One very senior British official first heard of Mrs. Thatcher's promise after the Madrid Summit to table alternative ways of achieving monetary union to that of the Delors Committee on his car radio."

Mr. Brittan went on to explain that

"The official was so astonished that he nearly drove his car into a tree."

Thus was born the plan for competing currencies.

The Treasury, struggling to fulfil the Prime Minister's command, had to do a quick search through the section of its files marked "Daft ideas which might appeal to our political masters". As in many previous cases, they found in the Institute for Economic Affairs file a paper on competing currencies by Friedrich Hayek, the patron saint of Thatcherism. Unfortunately, the former Chancellor's expressed enthusiasm for this idea of competing currencies was not shared by his Community opposite numbers, who basically killed it stone dead at a meeting of the Economic and Finance Council in Antibes in September of that year.

Following the failure of the Treasury to meet the former Prime Minister's demanding, if imprecise, specification to find something different, influential City interests and a former United Kingdom permanent representative to the Community, Sir Michael Butler, came to the rescue of the Government and the Treasury. In March 1990, the Invisible Exports Council published its proposals for the hard ecu, which, with minor amendments, were accepted by the Government.

It is understood that Sir Michael Butler sold it to the former Prime Minister as a market-driven alternative to a single currency. No doubt he drew on a lifetime's diplomatic experience of dealing with difficult individuals by telling them what they like to hear. The difficulty for the Government, however, is that it is abundantly clear that the proponents of the hard ecu have seen it as an evolutionary route to a single currency and not as an alternative to it.

As I pointed out in one of our earlier debates, Sir Michael Butler, on behalf of the Invisible Exports Council, drafted treaty amendments, which were published in October last year and which explicitly acknowledged the goal of a single currency in stage 3 of the Delors process. So, clearly, the architects of the hard ecu were in no doubt about what they were after.

The same cannot be said about the public declarations of the Government. According to the former Chancellor and present Prime Minister, when he presented the hard ecu plan at the German industry forum on 20 June last year he explained that

"in the very long term if peoples and Governments so choose it could develop into a single currency."

Of course, as we know, the former Prime Minister's view that she did not believe that the hard ecu could develop into a single currency was expressed more than once in the House; and of course, notoriously, in one of her latter-day contributions, she observed that it would not be widely used at all. And right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench sat there and nodded in agreement. That was in the days when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister. We hear a little bit more muttering about it now, but they all nodded dutifully in those days.

Of course, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer might have had other things on his mind as he was anticipating certain events. I gather that he has been to see the former Prime Minister to explain that he was not guilty after all. I can understand that these things were probably bearing heavily on his mind at that time.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Et tu, Brute.

Mr. Smith: I hope that *Hansard* notes that very apt intervention by my hon. Friend.

To confuse matters further, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is, after all, responsible for European issues, gave evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on economic and monetary union, which I think deserves a wider currency. I hope that the Financial Secretary is not excessively embarrassed at being quoted again. He said, in response to a question about the hard ecu scheme, that the next stage of having a single currency could actually happen more quickly going down this path.

The new Chancellor seeks to explain away this confusion by agreeing with all the three propositions and by stating that it is simply a matter of market choice—no need for Governments or Parliaments to take crucial decisions; it is simply a matter for markets. They alone, according to this theory, take the crucial decision as to whether we embrace a single currency.

Making the perhaps generous assumption that the hard ecu would be adopted by the European Community as a 13th and parallel currency available to the whole Community as an alternative money to their national currencies, there is clearly a risk that a weak national currency could be crowded out by the hard ecu as more and more companies and citizens preferred the security of harder money. According to this theory, a single currency would just happen, regardless of the views of Government or, of course, Parliament, unless Government took action to match the hardness of the ecu and therefore followed the policies proposed by the European monetary fund.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: May I just make the point before I give way?

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman insists on interrupting me, I will give way to him.

Mr. Nicholls: I put it to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it is perfectly clear that he does not intend to answer the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) about where his party stands on EMU. Is not the reason for that that the Labour party's policy on the EMU, in the words of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), is disturbingly inadequate? That is the charge which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to face today and he is taking up the time of the House in avoiding it completely.

Mr. Smith: It clearly was a mistake for me to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I was in the middle of an argument and, in an excess of generosity, I gave way to him. I will explain very fully what our position is, but I think that what I am saying is relevant. The hon. Gentleman may not like to hear it but I would have thought that it was the duty of the Opposition to comment on the hard ecu proposals, which the Chancellor boasted of as having been the Government's unique contribution to the debate. I cannot see why it should be a matter of criticism for me to draw attention to what I think are the deficiencies in his scheme. I am astonished that I should be subjected to criticism by the hon. Gentleman for seeking to do just that.

Before I was so inappropriately interrupted by the hon. Gentleman I was pointing out that the deficiency of that scheme was that the decision would be taken by markets and the paradox of such a situation would be that what amounts to a single currency could be—to use the dreadful word—imposed by the twin operation of the market and what in essence would be an all-powerful central bank.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I really must get on with my argument.

This may be what the Financial Secretary had in mind when he spoke to the House of Lords Committee.

We have heard a great deal about the Government's total opposition to the imposition of a single currency—a formulation of the issue which is thoroughly, and probably deliberately, misleading. It may suit the Government to use these words to assuage the Bruges group, and perhaps also its new president, but no one in the Community has the power—let alone, as I see it, the intention—to impose new monetary arrangements on the United Kingdom.

If, as a result of the intergovernmental conference, treaty amendments are agreed, they will have to be brought by Government to Parliament. They will come about only if the Government decide to adopt them and Parliament approves—so much for a single currency being imposed on anyone. The irony, of course, of the hard ecu proposal is that this could be a way of avoiding a decision by Government and Parliament in the name of market forces—hardly a prescription which the House should find attractive—if the real decision is taken by market forces.

Whether or not the proposal for a hard ecu would ever work, it does not face up to what I believe to be the key issue in the whole debate about monetary union: what form of accountability should exist for Community financial institutions. I think that a majority of the House, with some exceptions, is agreed that a completely independent European central bank would not be acceptable. In the opinion of the majority, there has to be some form of political accountability.

I do not think that the hard ecu proposal, with its proposed European monetary fund, deals adequately with this question. In a previous debate I asked the Chancellor, who was then Chief Secretary, to explain the arrangements for its accountability, and he appeared to have some difficulty in doing so. He told me that the Government were against an independent central bank, which is fine, and that

> "The monetary authority would be subject to political control, which would have to be negotiated".—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 284.]

In the published treaty amendments, to which the Chancellor drew the attention of the House, one of the relevant documents, in article V the Government have adopted the unusual tactic, on the question of accountability, of putting forward alternatives—a so-called alternative 1 and alternative 2. Alternative 1 would make the governors of the European monetary fund completely independent—as I read it, more or less Bundesbank-type control. Alternative 2 apparently would preserve national Government control over their appointees to the governing board and, presumably, the executive board of the European monetary fund.

What puzzles me is that, if the Government are clear that they are against an independent bank, they put forward an independent structure for the European monetary fund as one of the alternatives without apparently expressing a difference between them. What is it that the Government prefer? The House is entitled to ask that question and to hear an answer to it. All that the Chancellor told us was that he was interested in ideas. It is a fundamental point for a Government to put forward a proposal to others and be unable to answer, when they will undoubtedly be asked questions by others.

In addition, there is the problem of the way in which the European monetary fund is designed to work and to manage the hard ecu, which makes the question of accountability particularly intractable. In all circumstances, the hard ecu will reflect the value of the strongest currency in the system, which, as we know, is most likely to be the deutschmark. The European monetary fund will have to match the Bundesbank. Because of that built-in obligation, its policies and practice could hardly differ from those of the German monetary authorities. The hard ecu might become a figleaf covering the real monetary standard for Europe, which, in all probability, will remain the deutschmark. The absence of real discretion in practice for the European monetary fund makes the question of accountability almost academic.

For those reasons we do not think that the hard ecu adequately tackles what we consider to be a crucial matter. Nor, for that matter, do we think that the present Commission proposals, which envisage a basically independent central banking system, are satisfactory. We believe that there needs to be established a relationship of accountability between any central bank and the elected Governments of member states. That is why we have

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proposed that the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers—ECOFIN—should be strengthened and given the task of providing strategic guidance to the process of monetary co-ordination. In effect, it should become the political supervising body, with its own secretariat and permanent representatives, capable of adding an effective political dimension to the conduct of monetary policy and the external exchange rate policy of the Community. That proposal would also ensure that a line of accountability to national Parliaments would be preserved.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is there not a certain illogicality in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument? If he attaches such great importance to the principle of public accountability in monetary policy for Europe, and so on, why not opt for the logical approach which is to have direct and periodic accountability from the monetary institution at the centre of Europe to the European Parliament on the one hand and from component banks such as the Bank of England to national parliaments on the other hand?

Mr. Smith: Ours would be a better solution because it would mean that there is, right at the heart of the Community, a politically accountable body with far more effective influence and supervision than the rather gentle forms of accountability that the hon. Gentleman proposes. There probably will be a link with the European Parliament, but I do not think that hon. Members would feel that that was enough on its own. For the bank to give the odd report to a Select Committee here in the way in which the Governor gives evidence now——

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): There is no pressure.

Mr. Smith: As my hon. Friend says, there is not much pressure. There does not seem to be a strong line of accountability as a matter of judgment. I therefore respectfully disagree with the assessment made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman).

Sir Russell Johnston: Is not the right hon. and learned Gentleman slightly overstating the independence of the Bundesbank? After all, it is required to follow the general economic policy of the federal Government. For example it was against EMS in 1978, but it was overruled. Of course, more recently it was very much against Kohl's economic proposals for unification.

Mr. Smith: It is possible to overestimate the independence of the Bundesbank. It must operate within the general framework of economic policy which the German Government prescribes. It is fair to say that it has far more room for manoeuvre as an institution than the Bank of England or the Bank of France has traditionally had. I was slightly surprised that the hon. Gentleman made that point. I understood his party's policy to be that it was not specifically in favour of having an independent Bank of England and, even more so, an independent European central bank. However, he was quite right to draw attention to the fact that the Bundesbank is not totally independent. On German monetary union, one could argue that some of the issues that arose were not narrow monetary issues but important, broad political issues. It was not surprising that the German Chancellor felt that he had to express a view. It would be very odd if such decisions were taken by a bank and not by the Government of the day.

Mr. Favell: I agree with much of what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said, apart from the cheap political jibes that are part of the cut and thrust of debate. However, he should tell the country the Labour party's solution to this enormous problem. We want to know.

Mr. Smith: I do not intend to make expensive political jibes either out of office or in office. The hon. Gentleman might have noticed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was not wholly free from bias in his description of the Labour party, nor wholly free from rather cheap personal references. If the hon. Gentleman were as even-handed as he would like to be considered, he might have noted that as well. However, I am anxious to get on. I am making an important, positive suggestion—a clear alternative on political accountability. I hope that Conservative Members are paying attention.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): What is the right hon. and learned Gentleman going to do?

Mr. Smith: A Treasury Minister asks what I am going to do. My suggestion will fulfil an important task, which is to bring the central bank to political accountability. That may not strike that Treasury Minister as of any importance, but it will strike many hon. Members as being right at the heart of the matter.

ECOFIN's role has already been growing. It reports regularly on economic conditions within the Community and already conducts so-called multilateral surveillance. There is growing interest in such ideas, particularly by the Government of France, whose views were quoted with approval by the Chancellor, and who have made similar proposals for the role of ECOFIN and will no doubt be pressing them during the intergovernmental conference so that they will come to the attention of other member states.

Mr. William Cash: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I must be allowed to make progress.

There are some rather weak proposals for accountability to ECOFIN in the European monetary fund proposals in the treaty amendments, amounting to little more than a monthly report. We do not know what the Government's reactions to proposals for a strengthened ECOFIN would be. No doubt the Minister will give the Government's view.

Although it is important to secure accountability, it is far from the only consideration in assessing the desirability and feasibility of monetary union. Of overwhelming importance is the appreciation that any movement towards monetary union will be in the interests of the Community as a whole only if there is substantial convergence in the economic and social performance of individual states. Monetary union, in the absence of adequate levels of convergence, would create unbearable strains within the Community, threatening fragmentation rather than integration.

We therefore think that it would be a serious error to establish a rigid timetable for monetary union which ignores the realities of divergence in real performance. Progress should be by achievement of convergence, rather

than by the arbitrary use of the calendar. In that connection, we strongly believe in the importance of a greatly expanded system of regional and structural funds at the Community level.

I am afraid that the Government take as negative a view of regional policy at the European level as they do at the British domestic level. We believe that regional policy must be used as an effective means of assisting convergence and avoiding the risk that the establishment of a single currency would disadvantage weaker nations and regions.

At the end of this year, the Commission will review its regional and structural funds. It will be an important opportunity to review the instruments and resources available to the Community to promote the social cohesion and economic balance that we believe to be crucial objectives for the developing Community. The present Government's record in regional policy in our country and at the Community level leaves us with little confidence that they appreciate the importance of the issue. It will not be long, however, before a Labour Government can tackle it properly.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I have listened carefully to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said about regional policy. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition has said that he believes that monetary union should be accompanied by a massive regional policy. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain to me and my hon. Friends whether that means anything other than British taxpayers paying for a great deal of development in countries such as Greece and other less developed countries of the EC?

Mr. Smith: That is obvious, if the hon. Gentleman thinks about it. It is already reflected in the Community's provisions. The resources of the whole Community are made available for regional and structural funds. Every member state contributes to the funds and receives money from it. That is one of the principles on which the Community is established. If the Conservative party is at such a primitive stage that it cannot contemplate a regional policy at either British or European level, that is its problem, not ours. Its view is not widely shared in Europe.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that, even with the much improved budgetary arrangements negotiated by the Government, the effect of a massively increased structural fund programme would be a net outflow of funds from Britain to other countries?

Mr. Smith: I do not accept that that follows. [HON. MEMBERS: "It does."] It does not follow. There is no reason why it should. It is merely the Minister's assertion. It all depends how the fund is constructed and how the Government deal with it. It depends on the criteria applied and how they are administered.

It is depressing that Conservative Members simply do not understand how important regional policy is. It is regarded as important in all other European countries. It is one of the reasons why Thatcherism never crossed the English channel.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way. I have given way frequently.

The other countries of the European Community have a far more balanced idea of economic progress and see social progress as an integral part of it. The Conservative party remains unique as the most backward political party and the most backward Government in the whole Community.

Mr. Ian Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have given way frequently to Conservative Members, on many occasions extremely unwisely. I should get on with answering the question which they always ask me and say what our policy is. There are some other issues to be dealt with. I wish to proceed in detail on each item of policy.

We believe that there are other issues of considerable importance. It is important to distinguish between monetary union and the far from precise notion of economic union, implying as it might the loss of fiscal and budgetary sovereignty. The principle of subsidiarity should ensure that progress towards monetary union does not require a common fiscal or budgetary policy for the Community as a whole. As the *Economist* argued in an interesting article on 20 October 1900:

> "The view that a single currency must infringe fiscal sovereignty is simply wrong . . . A one currency EMU could and should leave governments free to tax and spend as they see fit and run whatever budget deficits the domestic and international capital markets are willing to finance. With the end of exchange rate uncertainty in Europe, that willingness might actually increase. EMU need not endanger fiscal sovereignty."

I agree with that conclusion. It should inform our approach. It is an antidote to the wilder assertions of both people who are opposed to the whole concept of the European Community and equally unrealistic advocates of a European superstate.

We also believe that progress towards monetary union should not prevent the widening of the European Community—which is highly desirable. The rapid accession of the former European Free Trade Association countries should be an objective to be enthusiastically pursued by the British Government. Of course, we should provide for the later association and accession of the new democracies in central and eastern Europe.

Those are the considerations which in our view are most germane to economic and monetary union at this formative stage. They are the criteria by which we shall judge the acceptability of the proposals which emerge from the intergovernmental conference and subsequent Community summits.

It would be easier for us all if our country were in a position of economic strength. Regrettably, despite the claims heard not so long ago from apologists on the Government Front Bench that in the course of experiencing an economic miracle we had surpassed the Germans and left them far behind, we know the reality of the result of a decade of Conservative economic mismanagement. In this important year, in which we should be preparing for the competitive world of the single market after 1992, investment is falling sharply. The Government predicted that manufacturing investment would fall by 7 per cent. this year. Training is being cut, output is falling and unemployment is rising.

Whether or not monetary union is achieved, our country will prosper only with consistent investment in supply side strength—in capacity, infrastructure and, most importantly, the skills of our people. Such investment is a

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necessary condition for economic success both within the United Kingdom and throughout the Community. After the wasted opportunities of the 1980s, that is the fundamental challenge that we must face in the 1990s.

5.25 pm

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): A large number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have sat here and listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), hoping that at some time during his speech he would answer the question put to him by several of my hon. Friends—whether it is the policy of the Labour party that we should move towards monetary union. The right hon. and learned Gentleman made several interesting comments about the European monetary fund and the European central bank without saying whether he referred to a monetary fund or central bank responsible for administering monetary union, to the hard ecu or to some intermediate stage. If the Labour party wishes to be taken seriously on the subject, it will have to answer the central question of whether it favours a move to monetary union.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke about the need for a long drawn out timetable. I agree that any early move to monetary union would be dangerous when there are such wide differences between the economies of various member states of the Community. There is no difference between him and the Chancellor of the Exchequer or among right hon. and hon. Members on that. However, we waited in vain to hear whether it would be the objective of the right hon. and learned Gentleman if he were Chancellor to take the country and our currency into monetary union, with all its consequences.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that it would be unwise to adopt monetary union in the near future. However, although I listened carefully without intervening—I was tempted to interrupt—at no point did he say whether his ultimate objective was monetary union. Perhaps he will intervene to tell me the answer.

Mr. John Smith: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman if he will tell me the Government's ultimate objective, as he understands it.

Mr. Stewart: We know the Government's objective perfectly well. They do not advocate monetary union. They have said that the hard ecu could be an intermediate step. They do not exclude the possibility of monetary union but they do not advocate it. That is my understanding of the position that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has explained on many occasions. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has given no such explanation of the Labour party's policy on a major constitutional and economic question.

Whatever our personal views of the desirability of monetary union, and whether it should come sooner or later, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not stated the view of the Opposition on an issue which he has described as profoundly important to us all. He undermines his credibility as a judge of these matters when he says that he is in favour of dealing with the problems of convergence by hugely increasing the structural funds, but does not admit that that would have an adverse impact on the United Kingdom's budget payments to the European Community.

I do not know what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been doing all these years while he has been shadow Chancellor, but he has not mastered any of the intricacies of the European budget. If he had, he would know that the more prosperous countries and those that receive less under the common agricultural policy arrangements, are bound to be net contributors, and any substantial reallocation of resources such as he advocates in order to encourage economic convergence would be bound to impose, not only on this country but on Germany, France and others, a large increase in their budgetary contributions. For him to brush it off and say that, because arrangements have not been decided, nobody can tell the answer, is to fly in the face of how the European budget is constructed. It is not good enough for him blithely to dismiss that as a matter of no interest and one which, if he were Chancellor, the United Kingdom could disregard.

The people of this country would not disregard the implications of paying out large sums of money in taxes to subsidise those in other countries who would be benefiting from the huge increase in the structural funds. The only way in which the proposal would not result in substantial transfers from the United Kingdom to the Economic Community's budget would be if Britain were to get a disproportionate share of the new structural funds. Unless the right hon. and learned Gentleman is arguing that a massive transfer of resources from other Community countries to the United Kingdom is a part of his convergence exercise, his remark that there would be no adverse budgetary impact on this country is nonsense, and he should recognise it as such.

I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's recognition that, in current circumstances, to have monetary union such as that advocated by the European Commission, and to have it in the foreseeable future, would have adverse consequences for all Community members because of the differences in levels of prosperity, job arrangements and mobility.

Mr. John Smith: I did not say that at all.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman implied that. Will he explain what he was implying when he said that monetary union would have adverse consequences in the short term?

Mr. Smith: That is a total misquote.

Mr. Stewart: I shall not misquote the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but state what he said. He said that he was concerned about economic convergence and different standards in the economies of various countries, which means exactly what I said.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to my comments. The principal matter with which I am concerned is the relative economic weakness of this country in relation to the other countries of the European Community. Should not that be a proper concern—particularly of a representative of the Conservative party that caused the problem?

Mr. Stewart: I did the right hon. and learned Gentleman the unjustified credit of believing that he had

some regard for other member states of the Community which were less prosperous. I thought that when he talked about convergence he meant the difference between the more highly industrialised and developed countries of the Community and those, such as the Mediterranean countries—particularly those which more recently joined. There is a considerable gulf between the economies of those Mediterranean countries and those of the Community's northern member states. I am pleased to withdraw the generous accusations that I made against the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The single experiment involving economic union that the European Community has so far undertaken has not been a success. The common agricultural policy is an attempt to impose economic union on a small percentage —about 4 per cent.—of the European Community's economy. Although it has dramatically encouraged output in that section of the European economy in recent years, it has caused major financial imbalances between different member states and raised the national self-interests of Germany, France and other nations to the point that they cut across the supposed ideas of European unity of purpose.

It is a damning comment on the wilder European aspirations of some other member states that, when forced to deal with matters in practical terms, their performance differs so much from the rhetoric that they use. The performance in relation to the negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade is the most recent example of that, but it happens in other spheres. In recent weeks, France has shown diplomatic independence in relation to the Gulf affair. Anyone who suggests that we are on the verge of being able to unify the foreign, security or economic policies of the European Community as a whole, is living in a dream world.

Many Conservative Members are in favour of many of the positive aspects of the European Community but very much regret it when it wanders into sectors not substantiated by the facts. The gulf between Euro-rhetoric and Euro-reality does not do the European Community any good and I should like the European Community to make progress towards overcoming it. Economic and financial convergence between members states would be good for the Community and for this country, but it is not encouraged by trying to pretend that we are much closer to being able to achieve such aims than we are in practice.

Therefore, I particularly welcome what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said about the practical proposals that he has made in relation to the hard ecu. There were some who criticised his proposal as some sort of negotiating ploy by the British Government. I never regarded it in that light: it seems a sensible development that takes forward the fact that the ecu has already become an established money of account. It already has a certain usefulness and credibility within the Economic Community and, in the hard ecu form proposed by my right hon. Friend and his predecessor, it could develop a valuable function, both commercially and for individuals within the European Community. If, in the long run, that were to lead to a desire for a single currency, I have no objection. That decision could be taken only in the light of events that may be many years ahead of us.

In this, as in most spheres of European policy, we need evolutionary development so that we can see how matters progress and adjust the process along the line. We do not want to decide, in advance, what the ultimate objective should be, and then find that, by adhering to it, we cause immense practical problems in the near future.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in a sense, deciding in advance what the objectives are, filling in all the details, having a deadline and deciding on the voluntary collective imposition of a policy applies exactly to the internal market—so why not to monetary union?

Mr. Stewart: The internal market is a series of practical decisions taken in the light of converging trade over a long period. Member states, including the United Kingom, have found obstructions and tried to remove them. That seems entirely different from imposing an ultimate target that is not self-evidently desirable at this stage.

It is all very well to say, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did, that monetary union does not necessarily mean political union. I take issue with him on that. I do not believe that it would be possible, for any length of time, to have unification of interest rates, every country assuming the external deficits or surpluses on balance of payments, with freedom of movement of goods and money around the Community, without imposing some form of supranational control to sustain the system.

It is often said that if there is only one currency, there should be only one Chancellor of the Exchequer or Finance Minister. I do not see any escape from that. One can find odd articles in *The Economist* and elsewhere suggesting that that is not the case, but there is no evidence that it is possible, for any length of time, to manage monetary union without political union. We should be clear that the one implies the other and we should not move towards a policy of monetary union unless we are prepared to accept that political union goes along with it.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that monetary union would impose a discipline on budget deficits throughout the Community and that that might be somewhat embarrassing for the Labour party, which has thrived on budget deficits?

Mr. Stewart: It would cause the Labour party problems but, from what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said, his policies would cause many other problems, of which a deficit might not be the greatest.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Stewart: I am afraid not, as I wish to respect the wishes of the Chair. We have all been asked not to speak for too long.

I have a few practical comments about the hard ecu. As I understood my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, inherent in his system would be recourse by individual member states to indemnify the European monetary fund for any losses that might be sustained by the issuance of hard ecus against the basket of currencies which incorporated a currency that devalued within the EMS. Such an arrangement would be essential and I hope that, in his negotiations, he will draw attention to this.

Any proposal that led to the conversion of softer currencies into hard ecu where the exchange risk was carried by the Community as a whole would not be fair on the countries that were managing their currencies more responsibly. It is an essential technical part of the

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proposals that what my right hon. Friend said this afternoon should have the practical effect of throwing that risk on to the countries whose currencies were weaker.

There is a prospect that a hard ecu could become commercially useful within the European Community as many more companies trade more thoroughly throughout the different countries within it. One of the arguments advanced by the Commission and others in favour of monetary union is that it would reduce exchange costs and conversion prices of currency in covering contracts. If one had an acceptable common currency such as the hard ecu, that benefit could be achieved without monetary union but by the step advocated by my right hon. Friend.

The other point—I speak only personally in this—is that I should find it useful to have a currency that I could use in any of the member states of the Community, perhaps initially only in hotels, for transport or such purposes, and perhaps only in the capitals or the main commercial or political centres. I suspect that many others, in this country and on the continent, would find that a valuable development.

To pick up a point made by my right hon. Friend, I can tell him that, in the Napoleonic wars, the Bank of England issued tokens that were acceptable as currency but were never legal tender. The same is true of Scottish bank notes now, which are acceptable in Cumbria, Northumberland and other northern counties and even in the Post Office of the House of Commons, but are not technically legal tender. There is no obstacle to the use of a common currency internally for retail and personal expenditure even without the full sanction of legal tender, a point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) in his intervention.

I should welcome such use of the hard ecu as a helpful development. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his predecessor, who is now the Prime Minister, on putting forward an idea that is valuable not only intrinsically but in terms of our negotiations with the European Community, and an idea that I should like to see put into effect. I hope that he will be as successful in persuading other member states that that should be done.

5.43 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) spoke about the wide differences in the Community—a point with which I shall deal later.

The only justification for the hard ecu was that it allowed the Government to avoid making a hard choice. It was a way to avoid saying no. I welcomed that development, as I thought that it was wrong for the country to be in a minority of one with 11 others against it. That is not diplomacy or good sense. That creates enemies where one does not need to create enemies. The Treasury's brilliant idea was to present this as an alternative. It is not an alternative, it is nonsense, but I hope that it will serve its purpose and bring about what I hope will come eventually—a greater realisation of the problems of the EMU.

Removing the right to change the value of one's currency is an act of extreme importance. In the post-war years, we saw two important changes of our currency. The Labour party may be a little paranoid about such a move, because it came in in 1949 and 1967. The first was a result of the war and the second was the result of the Barber boom. It was the Labour Government who had to deal with the consequences of those. Faced with such impossible situations, a devaluation became necessary.

The trouble with devaluation is the delay. It takes a long time before people realise the inevitability of it. Devaluation is not the only solution, but it is a valuable weapon. The first devaluation in 1949 was most successful. The devaluation from $4 to the pound to $2·40 to the pound led to the benefits that we enjoyed throughout the 1950s. So good were the benefits that we were able to ignore the Messina conference, because we were sure of the enormous advantages that we had. It ended with the "never had it so good" years of Harold Macmillan. Much the same happened in 1967. After the boom years, we were once more in a balance of payments crisis and once again, the decision was deferred.

Devaluation is of particular importance to manufacturing industry. something that I hold dear because my constituency has one of the largest manufacturing sectors of all constituencies. It consists almost entirely of small firms, but these are of enormous importance to the country, as they are in Germany, Japan and other countries.

Devaluation helps exports and reduces imports but, most importantly, it helps manufacturing exports and discourages manufacturing imports. Nobody can deny that it has inflationary consequences, but there is a time lag before those come through. That is a little shorter now but, during that period, something can be done if there is good sense in Government. The City and the Bank of England do not like devaluation; nor do those who like a strong pound, because of the foreign investment opportunities that it provides. Such opportunities are not necessarily to the advantage of our country.

In deciding the issue between industry and the City in favour of the City, the Government have lost a useful ally —the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI once promised a bare-knuckle fight to defend manufacturing industry, but many of the members of the CBI are now in service industries and industries that benefit from the strong pound. The Government should look again at the needs of manufacturing industry. Some Governments have favoured industry and, although they have been few and far between, I am happy to say that they have always been Labour Governments.

The price has to be paid. Once one decides to go for a high exchange rate, which is what we have now, and to have EMU or ERM, which presupposes a fairly high value for the pound, one is left with the problem of industry, with the result that industry is told not to increase pay to compensate for price changes. In the days of the previous Prime Minister, the Government used to say that pay demands did not matter. They thought that money supply would provide the answer. They were soon disabused and learned reality. It is not long before we heard the exhortation that is the main principle of reducing inflation now—keep pay demands down. Of course I have nothing against exhortation. It does no particular harm, but neither does it do much good. It is not a policy in itself. Eventually it is seen to be inadequate, and other policies are looked for.

There are two ways of looking at EMU. One is to obtain some stability in currency markets. I am in favour of stability. There would be a lot to be said for the level of

the pound against other currencies remaining pretty stable over a long period, until it became unsupportable, resulting in considerable devaluation or, possibly, revaluation. During that period one could have some very competitive pricing because people would not have to take into account the risks of devaluation or revaluation. There would be great advantage in that. One could compare it with what happens when there are more frequent changes in the value of currency, resulting in greater cost to both exporters and importers. I argue that the Bretton Woods period was very useful. But it could not last. Eventually adjustments of that kind are going to have to be made, but they will not be possible under EMU.

Mr. Taylor: I am concerned about the right hon. Gentleman's analysis, which seems to regard devaluation as a beneficial act. Devaluation is required only if a country has not been pursuing domestic policies that improve the competitiveness of its industry. It is clear that currency depreciation does not improve the competitive position of a country in relation to those countries with which it trades extensively. The old Phillips curve analysis is out of the window.

Mr. Sheldon: Of course, one can keep one's eyes closed if one wishes, but when one sees manufacturing industry suffering, what does one do? Does one allow unemployment to rise indefinitely? Of course one cannot do that. One has to face the reality. Any Government with any sense at all must face the reality when pushed to do so. I realise that Governments are reluctant to take this step, but occasionally it is necessary. I hope that that will be understood whenever these matters arise.

The other solution is to say that we must discipline our industry within EMU, that we have to punish workers with the threat of factory closures and unemployment. In this respect, EMU will be even less forgiving than ERM. The trouble is that some very highly respected economists and commentators do not understand the wage bargaining process as it is carried out in this country. It has resulted in much recrimination as those with high incomes—incomes obtained in comfortable and interesting occupations—have failed to understand, or even to feel, the frustration of so many who see their lives mapped out years ahead, with few, if any, chances for the future, other than the hope of higher pay for much the same job.

One may condemn this limited outlook. One may even, with much more justification, blame the managers, who cannot convey the feeling of participation in a worthwhile industrial venture. But condemnation will not change very much. Least of all can the Government, with their failure to understand industry, change perceptions and expectations.

There are many who have awaited with relish the discipline of the ERM and, now, of EMU. But discipline is too often the remedy of the inadequate. I remember, as a machine shop manager, reading adverts in the late 1940s. Some of them said something like "Manager required—good disciplinarian". That was the negation of management, and it owed too much to our class attitudes. To assume that ERM and EMU will do our job for us is to ensure that management will be less than professional.

There were the beginnings of enthusiasm for EMU, which we find a little more muted now. I fear that whatever happens will not benefit the City of London. I believe that Frankfurt and Tokyo will become even more dominant, because they have the manufacturing industry. As I have said before, I believe that markets follow money. Markets follow the creation of wealth. The fact is that wealth is not created in New York city or in London the way it used to be, because the manufacturing strength of the United States and the United Kingdom is not what it was. Of course we must help the City of London, which is very valuable indeed. There are those who look to EMU as the solution to a number of these problems.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) thinks that, if there is to be a central bank of Europe, control must be exercised by some body. I feel that it would be extremely difficult to control such a central bank. Indeed, controlling a central bank in one country is hard enough. The Chancellor of the Exchequer knows what problems he has with the governor of the Bank of England, even though they speak the same language and the Bank of England is only just down the road. Indeed, they meet at least once a week—at least, that was the case in my time. But if there were a central bank in Frankfurt, or wherever, the people going there would not even speak the same language with perfection. Thus the problems would be magnified greatly. It was because of such problems that we—with much Tory support, I must confess—nationalised the Bank of England many years ago.

Everybody wants to see convergence. It is asserted that that is the solution—that if we can get convergence, EMU, ERM and all these things will become possible. But when there is talk of convergence, everybody looks to Germany. When anybody in an organisation wants to spend money, he looks to the treasurer. I have been a treasurer, and I know the feeling. Someone has to provide money, not just for the north-east and Scotland, which are central to our hearts, but, as has been mentioned, to Greece, southern Italy, Spain, Portugal, and so on. Prosperous individuals and prosperous countries like Germany do not become prosperous by parting easily with their money.

It will be very difficult to find someone to finance all this convergence. When we talk of convergence, most of us mean convergence of living standards. Surely that is what it is all about. It is not about financial intermediaries, but about the living standards of our people. That type of convergence will be hard to achieve. Convergence of interest rates is much easier—it could be achieved now—but one cannot rely on monetary matters. One has to start looking at the fiscal consequences. That will come under ERM, let alone EMU. One will be limited in so many ways that one will have to start thinking in terms of increasing taxes.

I suspect that, even now, people in the Treasury are dusting down the idea of the regulator, whereby changes could be brought about very suddenly—changes in taxation that would have a great effect because of the need to control the economy. Fine tuning of the economy will not be possible under EMU to anything like the same extent if the financial possibilities of those changes are ignored.

Finally, there is the convergence of inflation as well as of interest rates. If one really insists on the convergence of inflation—by jacking up taxes or by some other means—one will force the country into a depression. If one is really serious about it, that will be a result. One will find oneself saying, "Thank you very much. We like these fine theories. We are very impressed by the ability of some of these people to spin out all these arguments, but it is the

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people of our own country to whom we have the greatest responsibility." Those who, during the inter-war years, undertook the role of bringing about that kind of depression should not look for their successors here and now.

Let us continue to discuss this matter. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East that saying no is no solution. What we have to do is say, "Yes, we are not just one out of 11. It may be that you are right, but, on the other hand, it may be that you will come to think that the solutions that you thought were right are not really the most sensible." Are Greece and Portugal really going to go for EMU at the end of the day? Certainly let us spin it out by the best possible means. The point about convergence is that, although our view is not likely to be wholly successful, we know the direction in which we should go. There are no mile posts but there is a direction, and that is about as much as we can hope for today.

5.59 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in this important debate.

The subject for debate is economic and monetary union and I shall resist the temptation to talk about ERM, on which my comments might be construed as slightly less than helpful to the Government. Nor shall I talk about political union, which even Jacques Delors realises is dead in the water as a result of the feeble EC response to the Gulf crisis.

I want to invite my right hon. Friend to consider that an economic and monetary union of sorts already exists within the EC and has existed for many years. I refer, of course, to the common agricultural policy. I invite right hon. and hon. Members to consider for just a moment that within the CAP there already exists a central prescriptive controlling body, the Commission, with a monetary fund of its own, with its own currency, the green pound, which in turn has spawned its own version of ERM, monetary compensatory amounts.

Let us contemplate, then, the history and experience of the CAP and judge whether that has worked. Farmers are not happy with it, but then one might say that farmers are not happy with anything. Then invite taxpayers, politicians, Governments and other nations in the world to consider whether they are happy with the CAP, and each time the resounding answer will be no.

Politicians have pulled agriculture up by the roots and transplanted it into an alien environment. They know not what they do. There is talk in the House today of convergence. For agriculture and the CAP there never was a prospect of convergence, because climate, geography, topography and a host of other things will never converge.

Economic and monetary union will be not dissimilar to the CAP. It would just be bigger and more disastrous. Its effects on the regions would be the same as those of the CAP, the effects of which have been most disastrous in those areas that they were specifically designed to help. Hon. Members who represent less favoured areas will know exactly what I am talking about.

Implicit in economic and monetary union is a single currency. Without doubt, a single currency would give rise to uncompetitive regions. Hon. Members may care to think along the lines of Wales and Scotland and the economic and monetary union that the United Kingdom has had for many years, in which they are still the uncompetitive parts of our economy.

Uncompetitive regions give rise to ever greater demands for regional aid. I am sure that the British taxpayer today will have noted the comments of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who envisages a situation in which taxpayers will be called on to stump up ever more of their hard-earned money to provide ever greater regional funds, not necessarily for Britain but for the disadvantaged regions of the whole of western Europe. The result would be that nationalist tensions would increase, and ultimately one can expect to see the break-up of the Community, as we now see the break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

A question sometimes asked is what harm a single currency has done to Wales, Scotland and Ireland, but the real question is what good has been done to the regions of the United Kingdom. Has having a single currency stimulated enterprise, initiative, innovation and entrepreneurial activity in the regions of this nation? On the contrary, it has reinforced and underwritten the dependency culture. It has increased dissatisfaction with the Government and it has heightened nationalist feeling. Conservative Members miss having more colleagues from Scotland and Wales on these Benches.

There is no case for another common institution—certainly not the economic and monetary union that we are discussing today. The best prospect for Britain's prosperity and the prosperity of my constituents and those who live in Wales and Scotland, and indeed all those who live in the nations of western Europe, is a Community of individual co-operating sovereign states.

Our priority at this time must be to make the existing institutions work, not to spend time and energy tilting at windmills. We must put our best foot forward to complete the single market based firmly upon four freedoms—freedom for goods and for services to be bought and sold without fiscal, technical and practical barriers, freedom for capital, and freedom for people to move within and throughout a wider community without let or hindrance. More than that is unnecessary, and more than that is unwanted.

6.6 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will excuse me if I do not immediately follow him, but I find it difficult to understand how a member of the Conservative and Unionist party could put forward such a robust argument against having Scotland and Wales as part of the United Kingdom, suggesting that they would have done much better had they stayed on their own. However, I do not want to follow him down that road, about which we could have a long argument all night. There is not much time, and I too shall seek to be brief.

It is a moot point whether economics determines politics or politics determines economics. Certainly politicians try and certain politicians have a considerable notion of their capacity to succeed.

The Liberal Democrat approach to the EC is, in the first instance—I make no bones about it—political. We believe

in a political union, partly for emotional reasons but also because there are practical advantages to be derived from collective influence in Europe and from thinking through common positions in Europe. As has been said, it is true that co-operation in Europe has not really worked so well on the Gulf as it might have done, but that is no reason for doubting the possibility of achieving such an approach, as I am afraid the Prime Minister did last Tuesday. On the contrary, it underlines the need to proceed further. If members are knitted into a political union in the way that we think they should be, there would be a much better chance of producing a coherent and acceptable approach.

Political union also involves the acceptance that others might have something to teach us about politics and government. Equally, the economic record of successive Governments since the war does not lead me to fight in the ditches to make sure that all economic decisions affecting the country are made in this country, or to avoid having economic decisions affecting this country being in part determined in conjunction with other people.

Why should we support economic and monetary union? I will run through the simple arguments quickly, but the first point is that transaction costs are reduced. That is a straightforward, unarguable point. It does not apply to the hard ecu, but I shall come back to that. Secondly, there is strong evidence to suggest that it would lower inflation. Certainly the creation of a central bank would lead to a degree of credibility if it was like the Bundesbank, which is not absolutely independent but has an important area of independence. Because they can rely upon the position of the central bank and know that inflation will not rise, employers and employees restrain wages. That in turn has an effect on jobs and investment.

We support a single currency, but the idea that it will be imposed is ridiculous. Equally ridiculous is the idea that it can be brought in overnight. Nobody will rush headlong into it. We must have a central bank first, as stage 2 of Delors forecast. As I understood it—I may be wrong—the main objection advanced by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to creating a central bank was the democratic deficit argument, that somehow it would be an undemocratic institution and therefore bad, QED. He produced the ECOFIN proposals as a contrast.

There are three reasonable arguments why the Bundesbank, with its current degree of independence, is acceptable to persons who think that democracy is important, as I do. First, its constitution would be written and approved by democratically elected politicians; the bankers would be appointed by politicians; it would have to report to politicians, and its constitution would require it to run its monetary policy in line with the general policies of the European Community.

Secondly, to have an independent bank is in line with the philosophy of limited government. A politically run monetary policy is not necessarily good for the long-term health of the economy. We have been told for 10 years that the central purpose of the Government's economic policy is to reduce inflation. Ten years on, inflation is down marginally from what it was in 1979; certainly it was marginally up not many months ago. Sometimes politicians can go wrong because, as the time approaches to go to the polls, they are tempted to change things and make them a little better.

Thirdly, experience in Germany, and for that matter in the United States, of an independent central bank is good. There is often tension between the elected Government and the bankers, as there was recently in Germany, but I do not think that anyone considers that American or German democracy is undermined because of the existence in their countries of a central bank. On the Bundesbank committee there are even representatives of the Lander or the regions, who can vote against the advice of the Bundesbank president.

The hard ecu is an idea, but in the end we regard it as diversionary and political rather than attractive in itself, although it would be reasonable to examine it further to see whether it would have any value as a transitional mechanism. We know that it is not the end of the road, although I suspect that many Conservative Members—certainly those who lend allegiance to the Bruges group—would like to see it at the end of the road. They do not want it to succeed, as the president of the Bruges group has indicated. *[Interruption.]* The Financial Secretary should stop swinging his worry beads.

I have several criticisms of the hard ecu. Undoubtedly it maintains transaction costs. It would also obscure responsibility for monetary policy and divide it between the central monetary fund, whatever it is called, and state banks. In the Government's proposed treaty provisions, article VI(5) says:

> "The national monetary authorities of the Member States shall be obliged to repurchase excess quantities of their national currencies held by the Fund."

That is strong stuff, if one's main preoccupation is with national sovereignty. I do not quite understand it. Nor do I understand, despite what the Chancellor said, what the attraction would be for borrowers. If there are realignments, two or more realignments could arbitrarily write up the debt in hard ecu. Overall, I do not think that it will have much future.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that Spain had shown interest. That is true, but I doubt whether that interest will be long-term. I suspect that it is part of the bridging operation which is going on in the Community, as is perfectly right and desirable.

We tried to make a small contribution to the debate by publishing this morning a pamphlet which we commissioned from Professor John Williamson, the economist, on the role of the United Kingdom in EMU. I will not quote at length what he said. The pamphlet is available; I commend it to the Chancellor and to hon. Members. Professor Williamson refers to phasing. Liberal Democrats accept phasing. Up to stage 2, we are firm, but stage 3 has no date anyway. We have to be clear that there is much more definite convergence before stage 3 than has been shown so far. That is not to say that, for example, Greece alone should hold up stage 3. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East that regional and social funds will have an important part to play.

There are problems about convergence. One idea suggested by Professor Williamson, which is not entirely original in that it has been used already in a limited way in the United States, is that there could be a European minimum unemployment benefit. He said this morning:

> "I argue that there is a far stronger case for coordination of fiscal policy to complement monetary union than is generally conceded in Britain. One aspect of that coordination could help relieve the concerns about exchange-rate flexibility, namely, a European-wide minimum unemployment benefit, set at say current Portuguese levels. It would be paid out by

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Brussels from a certain tranche of allocated tax revenue taken from member states, who would of course be free to 'top-up' the unemployment benefit."

In a sense, that is another argument for financial transfer to regions within countries which have problems. As I understand it, it operates in the United States and benefited Texas during the 1986 fall in oil prices which severely affected Texas incomes.

Despite the fact that I found the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East persuasive, amiable and clear all at the same time—something fairly rare in politicians—he did not sell ECOFIN to me as the great solution to it all. All that means is that the Council of Ministers shall determine monetary policy, and I do not consider that a good idea in the long term. Politically, it comes back to the desire that I mentioned earlier, which is felt by all politicians, to tune up the economy the nearer an election date comes.

I give the right hon. and learned Gentleman credit for the straightforward way in which he conceded that Government parties in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s misjudged and misrepresented the European Community and its opportunities. As a Liberal who was active in politics throughout most of the period, and certainly active in supporting my colleagues in the run-up to the 1959 election, I take a lot of pride in the consistency demonstrated by the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Alliance and the successor party over a period of years.

The basic point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is pretty fundamental: that if this country is now set on a course within the European Community—and I see no alternative—it must play a full part in working through the various inevitable changes. It is not going to stop; it is going to move forward. The whole idea of delay, of producing diversions, is not a good one. We must face up to the fact that there will be economic and monetary union and, on that basis, make a constructive contribution to its shape.

6.21 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I agree with the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that the European Community is moving forward and that we must be part of that forward movement, but I suggest that he is a little hard on the Government in his remarks about the hard ecu, particularly when he dismisses it as solely a diversionary and political tactic. The perception which has grown among our European partners of the evolutionary value of the hard ecu proposals is a demonstration of their worth.

However, with due respect to the Liberal Democratic party, if I have the name right, of more significance among speeches from the Opposition Benches are the two contributions so far from the Labour party. First, from the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, we have a clear-cut call for devaluation. I would have hoped that the Labour party, of all parties, had learnt that the devaluation route is not a way out of economic and social difficulty for either this country or any other. The Labour party's many years of bitter experience should have shown him that.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East produced a very uncertain prospect. Most of it seemed to be a black hole wrapped in cotton wool. The only possible proposal of interest was the ECOFIN proposal, which would be very ill received by many other members of the European Community, who have a much more positive interest in sound monetary policy than in the political controls which would be put in place by an ECOFIN system of the kind that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has in mind.

We are having this debate at a time when the Gulf casts its shadow, quite rightly, over our deliberations here, and economic and monetary union may seem a somewhat esoteric subject at present; nevertheless, we all understand that we are debating something of the most fundamental significance for the future of this country—that is, our collaboration and the part that we shall play in the European Community, and the great significance for us of monetary union or the movement towards it which is taking place.

We all therefore accept the crucial importance of the subject, and we must continue to understand that life will go on after the Gulf, that enormous problems such as the GATT round and the future of world trade must be resolved and that the European Community has a part to play in all this.

The second impact of what has happened in the past few days with Iraq has been the extremely depressing performance of the Community in regard to political co-operation. Some commentators and some of my hon. Friends have taken the view that it proves that the European Community has little future and that we should pick up our skirts, walk away from it and have nothing to do with those funny foreigners across the channel. I do not take that view—quite the opposite. Depressing though many of the developments are, I suggest that they mean that there is a challenge to be faced and a job to be done, and that much of that job is one for which Britain is extremely well qualified by our history and present performance. Far from being negative, therefore, the strong requirements for political, diplomatic and possibly military and security co-operation demonstrate that the European Community is where we need to be.

Fundamental to that is the question of monetary integration. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that monetary integration was a logical development of the single market. That is precisely the point at issue. It is a message that should go out from this debate, that the Government and the majority of hon. Members—even though those of us who regularly attend European debates know that there is a kaleidoscope of opinion in the House, with no demarcation down the middle of the Chamber—believe that membership of the European Community is of great benefit and that this benefit must continue to be reinforced.

One way forward is to make sure that the single market works, and moves to improve monetary integration are an indispensable part of it. The direction and pace of that integration need, quite rightly, to be discussed, and in slow time, at the intergovernmental conference. It will be a great blessing if in such debates we can look at these great issues calmly, because when we do so we shall find that it is not a question of one country against another or of Britian against the 11 but that the pressures and views and stresses are very broad throughout the Community. There are many in France and Italy who feel deeply the sort of concerns that we have about economic divergence and the impact that it would have if nations tried to force the pace.

It is significant that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East ducked the issue of regional funding. It would be hugely difficult to move towards the sort of covergence needed, bridging those massive gaps to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred, between the economies and societies of the European Community, by regional funding. It is but one element of a complex advance. That is why the intergovernmental conference is there.

I commend the Government's approach. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has struck a successful and positive note in his exchanges since he assumed that office. I believe that he will receive firm response from our European allies. The French and Germans have precisely the same concerns, for example about divergence, as we do. Therefore, we have many more allies in the corridors of Europe than one might believe from reading the popular press or the simplistic, black-and-white naivety to which we are sometimes subjected in relation to the European Community.

None of us knows where all this will eventually lead. I am suspicious of people who grope for historical parallels and who say that it has never worked in the past. Welding the 12 nations of Europe together, to the extent that all of us wish to weld them together, is an historic development. None of us can forecast where it will end, but most of us accept that the process must be kept moving. I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his Front Bench colleagues recognise that fact.

Nothing should be said in the House tonight which will leave our partners or the world in any doubt about the Government's commitment to economic and monetary convergence. If we send that sort of negative message, it will have an immediate impact on the level of the pound, and the long-term impact would be even greater. We should not be misled by our present strong and happy relationship with Washington. We should not be led to believe that the old-style special relationship is back. Yes, there is something special about our relationship. When the famous chips are down, there is a firm relationship between Washington and London.

However, the fundamental questions about economics and power will not go away. The Americans believe that the European Community is an entity which is here to stay, with which they will have to deal in the future. They want us to be in the Community, playing a leading part and making a strong contribution. So do I, and so do the majority of people in this country.

6.32 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): There is an air of unreality about this debate, and it is not solely due to the fact that our thoughts are concentrated on the Gulf, as the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) said, and that this debate seems to be somewhat remote from our major concern. It has been misleading to put so much emphasis in the debate on our proposals for the hard ecu, as the Chancellor and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) have done.

It was interesting to have that subject elaborated, and I do not take the severe view that some hon. Members have taken of the Government's proposals. However, they are relevant only to stage 2 of the three-stage Delors plan. Within that context they may have a serious reception on the continent of Europe, but they divert us from the main issue, because the other 11 countries are really concerned not about stage 2 but about the political objective. They are concerned with the political unionist objective of creating a single currency as a necessary means to establish a union state in western Europe. That is what it is all about, and unless we understand that clearly we may easily be misled and locked into, or tripped up by, relatively technical issues when the main issue is direct and political.

When I re-read the evidence that the Prime Minister —then the Chancellor of the Exchequer—gave to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on 25 July 1990, I was impressed. In his opening statement to the Select Committee he said:

"it seems to us that the Delors package for Stage 3 would involve transfer of sovereignty from the United Kingdom and from Parliament of a sort neither the Government nor Parliament would find themselves able to accept."

The Government have come near to restating that during this debate, and I am glad to see that the Financial Secretary is nodding his head in agreement. That is fundamental, and I wish that my right hon. and learned Friend would state with equal clarity that he accepts that a single currency—and all that goes with it—would involve "transfer of sovereignty . . . of a sort neither the Government nor Parliament would find themselves able to accept."

That is not merely party will but national will, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will come to accept it. A single currency does not merely affect our constitution and our capacity and right to govern ourselves, but is also an economic issue of fundamental importance.

I have heard different views expressed about the use of currency revaluation and devaluation as a means of dealing with serious economic disequilibria and problems such as a major recession, massive unemployment and a huge trade deficit. Everyone knows that devaluation has a downside, and no one but a fool would recommend it as a weapon to be used other than in very serious circumstances. That was our post-war experience. From the end of the war, and from Bretton Woods, we had a fixed but adjustable exchange rate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, reminded the House recently, we changed the exchange rate only once in 1949—it had not been changed since the war—and there was one further devaluation in 1967 from $2·80 to $2·40.

If one maintains the exchange rate for a substantial time, no one can say that one is using exchange rate policy frivolously. The major argument, which I think everyone in the country would agree with, was that if the Labour Government of 1964-70 made one mistake which was more searing than any other, it was that they delayed the necessary devaluation. They should have devalued earlier. The country's economy benefited from it.

If anyone had proposed to the United States four or five years ago, or even now, that it should permanently lock its exchange rate to that of the yen, what would have happened? What would happen if it did that now, having gained some benefit and recovery from a floating exchange rate policy in the past few years? If the dollar were to be frozen against the yen, I have no doubt that in a few years the United States would find itself increasingly uncompetitive against the Japanese. Unless the Unites States were prepared to accept the Japanese eating up its industry and becoming the owners of United States real estate and

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shares, it would feel bound to break the exchange rate's parity that it had established. We know that to be true, so why should we talk not about the exchange rate mechanism, which is a fixed but changeable regional version of the International Monetary Fund, but about an entirely new system which in no circumstances would ever allow us again to change our exchange rate?

If we were not successful economically to the same extent as our partners may be, we should suffer most profound damage as a nation and as an economy. We should find unemployment rising to pre-war and indeed higher levels, and there would be no escape from it. British industry would not be profitable and would close down operations in this country, with new industry locating on the continent of Europe or in other places where sustained growth and profits were possible. All the marvellous training of skilled people and graduates coming out of universities, higher education and other establishments that my right hon. Friends are determined to create would have to look for jobs, not in their own country, but across the channel on the continent of Europe. That is not a vision of the future that I find attractive.

I think that it is almost an act of national suicide for any country, knowing that it is entering a group of nations in which clearly we are not yet as strong as we should be or may be, or in time will be in comparison with Germany and others at present, to expose itself to merciless competition with the Germans whom we know will destroy this country's industry and its jobs. Nobody should impose this on the British people.

I feel that the opposition in principle to EMU is on two grounds. First, it amounts to national economic suicide. Secondly, it is an outrage to the whole tradition of self-government in this country. Those should be the two principles on which we say no to what is being put forward in Europe.

The draft treaty has considerable relevance to what we are talking about. Although the Chancellor of the Exchequer rightly said that, after all, this is only the Commission's document, it drew up this document not out of the air or its own cerebrations in that great office building, the Berlaymont, but after taking part in and guiding the major discussions that have been held in the past year with all of the Community members. That is why the document has force and is very powerful.

Alongside it, and in no way disagreeing with it, is the document put forward by the governors of the central banks. Reservations have been expressed by some people to the effect, "If we can only get this put right, it will make such a difference," but in no way are those reservations expressed in treaty terms comparable to the creation of a central bank and other institutions that go along with the creation of economic and monetary union.

Economic convergence is obviously a way of dodging the whole issue. If we did have such convergence in terms not merely of rates of inflation but of productivity and output with our major competitors in the Community, we would not worry. There would be no problem, for we would be doing as well as they were. But who has ever heard of nations over time achieving the same rate of productivity and growth of output? Of course that has not happened. In the past, our currency has reflected that in substantial movements against other currencies on the continent.

I am very much in favour of getting down our rate of inflation and we still have a lot to do in that regard. We could have a rate of inflation no greater than that on the continent of Europe, in Germany, but if we did not have the same rate of productivity, output and growth, we would still become uncompetitive in price terms and would therefore be at an accumulating competitive economic disadvantage. Economic convergence does not help us very much.

Those who take the view that we can put off the whole thing, that we must not have dates in mind or be fixed to a timetable and that all is well, have only to consider the fact that the timetable is written into the draft treaty. Stage 2 begins on 1 January 1994, and stage 3 will, following a review and decision, be taken not later than the beginning of 1997—probably during the period of the next Labour Government, which does not seem very attractive to me, or the Government after that.

I do not know whether the House is aware that those who have looked seriously at this proposition—and not many people look seriously at the consequences of economic and monetary union—have always said that there will have to be a tremendous regional policy, a huge transfer of resources. The only serious study that has been made was that conducted by Sir Donald MacDougall, who used to be chief economic adviser to the Confederation of British Industry, a very distinguished and independent economist. He made the study as long ago as 1977. His finding was that the budget of the Community would have to be at least seven times as large as it is to begin to finance the transfers which are required. That was before Spain, Portugal and Greece became members of the European Community.

How big a European budget do the advocates of this madness envisage, and what method of financing of that budget is envisaged? It would have to be a budget which not merely raised this vast amount of revenue from the nation states, but it would have to be redistributed on a basis that helped us, and no doubt the Portuguese, the Spaniards and others as well—at whose expense? It would be at the expense of Germany.

Mr. Favell: The right hon. Gentleman is making a very important point extremely well. After more than 20 years of the common agricultural policy, the penny is now only beginning to drop that farmers in Greece, Portugal, Germany and Britain behave in different ways. How much worse will it be when we have to ensure that boot manufacturers, cycle manufacturers, steel makers and coal producers have to behave in the same way to achieve this convergence?

Mr. Shore: I do not think that there is time to answer difficult questions of the kind that the hon. Gentleman has posed.

I turn from the business of the convergence and regional policy to another major issue which has not been raised in the debate. We are talking about economic and monetary union. All that I have said so far, and virtually all that the House has had to say so far, has been about monetary union; but economic union is here, too. It is spelt out in a number of interesting and important articles.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) are anxious to retain the powers of Chancellors over taxation and public expenditure. No doubt they delight in the fact that in the latest presentation the original Delors proposal for binding rules that would limit the powers of Chancellors of the Exchequer has been withdrawn. It has been withdrawn in favour of what are now called guidelines.

I draw the attention of the House to the guidelines in the draft treaty presented by the Commission. The guidelines refer to the following matters:

"the development of Member States budget balances; the control of production costs . . .; the level and promotion of saving and investment".

There is reference to other matters, and the article continues:

"The Council acting by a qualified majority . . . shall adopt these guidelines".

That of course refers to guidelines laid down by the Commission. It continues:

"On the basis of an annual report of the Commission, the Council shall each year decide . . . on the adjustments that need to be made to the multiannual guidelines".

Later, it says that the Council, acting again by a qualified majority, may, where necessary, adopt recommendations specific to each member state determining the general thrust of its economic and budgetary policy.

Then there is the following passage:

"The Commission shall see to it that specific recommendations are implemented . . . A recommendation concerning the measures which must be taken to rectify the situation".

That will be submitted privately to the Council of Ministers; if the member state does not obey within a month, the Commission may make its proposals public. The measure is, of course, deliberately designed to destabilise and undermine the authority of a Government who pursue an economic and budgetary policy with which the Community and the Commission disagree. It is not a very welcome prospect. Although they have not the same strength as binding rules, these are serious guidelines.

Moreover, the harmonisation proposals for indirect taxation, although far from complete, are intended to prevent any movement away from the existing average. Following the promulgation of those proposals, indirect taxation in the form of VAT, excise duty and, I am willing to bet, corporation and company tax will become impossible within a few years.

Future Chancellors of the Exchequer will not have much freedom of action. There will still be a Budget, public expenditure exercises and the ability to raise revenue, but, as the indirect taxation will be bound by treaty rules, it seems likely that the only revenue that the Chancellor will be able to raise is income tax. I foresee a significant limitation of power—quite apart from all the damage that would result from a fixed exchange rate, and from economic and monetary union.

We have heard a good deal about the importance of accountability. The draft treaty mentions that, as does the other document submitted by the bankers. The treaty states:

"In performing their duties, the European Central Bank, a central bank of a Member State and members of their decision-making bodies shall neither seek nor take instructions from the institutions of the Community or its Member States or from any other body."

It is written into the terms of reference that the overriding priority must be price stability, and that external influence exercised by the Community or by individual nation states must be removed.

Never in my life have I read a document that gave bankers more power over economic, national and Community life. I am referring not to the bankers' document, but to the Commission's document, which takes account of the political worries that have been expressed.

I find the whole prospect extremely unattractive. I should like to send a firm message—sadly, I cannot, because we are debating on an Adjournment motion—to the effect that we are prepared to co-operate as much as we can, and are not opposed to some policy co-ordination where it makes sense; but, by God, we will not, not, not allow majority rule from Brussels to determine the welfare, prosperity and self-government of the British people.

6.53 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I ought to begin by reminding the House of my association with two City institutions, Morgan Grenfell and Dewe Rogerson.

It is always a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)—although I rarely agree with him, and did not today. I was, however, extremely amused when he said that no one but a fool would necessarily urge devaluation. I cannot recall one occasion, in all the time I have followed the right hon. Gentleman's political utterances—whatever the state of the business cycle, and whatever the parity—when he did not urge that course. His rejection today of the idea that we could ever compete with Germany in regard to inflation or productivity struck me as the philosophy of despair, and I do not think that any Conservative Member would accept it.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I am sorry, but I am under considerable time pressure.

I wish to make five points, and I hope that the logical connection between them will emerge as I proceed. First, I welcome the Government's decision to join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. I welcomed it in October, and I do so just as warmly now. I trust, however—I am expressing confidence, not just hope—that when the decision was made, the Government did not consider the ERM a definitive solution to the monetary problems faced by this country or, indeed, by the European Community as a whole.

I have no doubt that, in the short term, the ERM can act—indeed, it is already acting—as a very effective mechanism to enforce greater inflationary and monetary convergence within the Community. Clearly, we can only benefit from that, as our inflation rate is one of the highest. In the longer term, however, the ERM—like any other attempt in human history to establish a fixed exchange rate system—will inevitably run up against the fundamental contradiction that is common to all such systems: if there is no intention that parities should ever be altered, there is no reason for the retention of separate currencies in the first place. A single currency is a much better idea.

[Mr. Davies]

Once it is accepted that in certain circumstances the parities will be adjusted, there will inevitably come a time when the market anticipates such changes. That will mean extremely high economic costs for member states, which must adjust demand management in their own economies —running demand at a much higher level with inflationary consequences, or at a much lower level with recessionary consequences, in order to maintain the system.

Let no one suppose that we are in a better position to avoid such problems than we were at the time of Bretton Woods. On the contrary, we are in a much weaker position to sustain such a system over a long period, for the simple reason that we now have almost entirely liberated capital movements in the OECD area. Moreover, the volume of capital transactions in that area amounts to more than 10 times that of current transactions in the world. Things were very different when almost all Governments operated exchange controls, and capital movements were a residual balancing item largely controlled by Governments. We must look beyond the ERM, and consider where it will and where it should lead.

Secondly, and for much the same reasons, I warmly welcome the Government's proposals for a hard ecu. The Chancellor of the Exchequer set out the advantages with great lucidity today and described the sharp anti-inflationary teeth built into the British plan. That, too, will be a powerful mechanism to enforce increased monetary and inflationary convergence in the Community. If accepted, the hard ecu proposal will enable us to establish the institutional basis for a European monetary institution, which could become a European central bank. Clearly, we cannot go further until the institutional structure is in place.

My third point is this. Both moves, although important in themselves, point to the emergence of a single currency at some point in the future, as the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has explicitly recognised. Do we want a single currency? That is the great question. Is a single currency in our interests? Opinion may be divided, and that is precisely why I wanted to speak in today's debate.

There is considerable academic literature on the question of what should constitute an optimum currency area, and there is a consensus remarkable within economic science that, so long as certain conditions are met, a single currency should pertain in an area and that the economic cost of separate currencies is then greater than that of a single currency.

Those conditions are fundamentally twofold. One is that there should be integrated product markets and the other is that there should be integrated factor markets within that optimum currency area. With the single market programme, we are achieving an integrated product market in the European Community and we already have an integrated factor market. There have been integrated labour markets for quite a long time, and integrated capital markets since last year when exchange controls within the Community were finally abolished. I have little doubt that in those circumstances the advantages of a single currency are potentially enormous.

The first advantage, which has often been mentioned in this context, is the abolition of the transactional costs which at present are borne by individuals when they travel and by businesses when they trade across the frontiers within the Community. Those costs will largely remain under the ERM, as is generally recognised. A single currency would also bring about the abolition of the foreign exchange risks which currently burden business and deter some people from quoting when they otherwise might. Thus at present output is reduced and employment foregone. The ERM will help a little with the foreign exchange risks but will not, of course, remove those risks.

The third advantage, which is less often recognised in the debate, is the fact that a single currency will remove the informational barriers to trade which are constituted by fragmented separate currencies. Those barriers are considerable in all aspects of trade and particularly crippling—perhaps even fatally so—in certain sectors of activity such as retail financial services, where the Cecchini report indicated that there was substantial scope for an increase in the wealth of the Community through market integration, and where we in this country believe that we have potentially a particular financial advantage. Those are very important benefits to play for. If we can achieve them, it is our duty to do everything possible to secure for our people, our businesses, our employees and our consumers the substantial benefits that would flow.

My fourth point is that, because the stakes are so high, if we go for a single currency we must get it right. We must not rush our fences. Indeed, if we got it wrong we might lose an historic opportunity and that would be a great dereliction of the duty that we owe to the people who sent us to this place and to future generations. Therefore, the whole matter must be carefully thought through and worked out. The Government are absolutely right to be cautious, to ask the hard practical questions along the way and not to be carried away by any kind of facile Euro-rhetoric. I congratulate the Government on their pragmatic and positive approach.

Judging by the speech in the House today from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), it is almost certain that, if the Labour party were in power, it would not get it right; in fact, it would get it appallingly wrong. I will dwell on one or two instances of that. Within a single currency area in the European Community, there will be internal payments disequilibria as there are within this country, as there are within the United States and other single currency areas. There are current payments disequilibria between the west end and the east end of London.

How will these be coped with? The right hon. and learned member for Monklands, East seemed to presume that they could be dealt with by being recycled through compulsory fiscal public sector transfers. That would be an absolute disaster; we would go right back to the bad old days of subsidising failure and inefficiency and penalising success. I cannot think of a more fatal way to start off this important monetary venture.

Of course, if we are to get this right, current payments disequilibria must be recycled through the private sector capital flows that will take place in the Community. That is the way it is done within the United States—a very substantial single currency area—and indeed, within this country at present. That requires changes that will not come about overnight. At present the banking system in the European Community, the system of distribution of securities, the portfolio preferences of both institutional and private investors are all much too narrowly based nationally. That will not change overnight. It must change

in order to permit those private sector capital flows to achieve their proper economic purpose. I have no doubt that in time they will succeed in doing that.

Current payments disequilibria must also be adjusted through changes in output and prices. For that reason, we need more, not less, flexible markets. Those Opposition Members who are always urging us to be more communautaire and at the same time accept the notions of the European social charter are in fundamental contradiction with themselves. If we want a single currency area to operate effectively, we must have more flexible labour prices and markets. Anything like the social charter which creates new rigidities and new costs is thoroughly unwelcome.

My final point is particularly important. Although I believe that the Government are already persuaded on this point, I hope that no-one in this House will have any illusions about it. In the course of these negotiations with our continental partners, should they arrive at a position where inexorably they go ahead with a single currency, regardless of what we propose to do, then I put it to the House that we cannot in any circumstances remain apart from that single currency. Very briefly, I will set out four concrete and specific reasons why that is so.

First, trade between this country and the Community in such circumstances would be conducted in that single currency. That would mean that our producers and our businesses would incur all those transactional costs and foreign exchange risks while their continental competitors would not suffer them. That would handicap our industry indefinitely. Secondly, the same position would apply to investors from ourside the Community who might be looking to invest in this country and to build capacity here targeted at the Community market as a whole.

An example is the Japanese, whom we have welcomed here in that context in the past few years. They would not come here in those circumstances, or they would be much less likely to come, simply because any business located here would face those transactional costs and risks in servicing the continental market. That again is a reason why we dare not go down that road.

Thirdly, it would make it impossible for the financial services sector in this country—here I refer to the retail financial services sector—to cross-sell its products in the Community, whether they be insurance products, unit trusts, or whatever. They would not get the benefit of the branding and the track record and of common computer systems and the common training of salesmen. They would have to repackage and produce different products on the continent, and that would be a very severe handicap in a field in which there is otherwise an immense amount to go for.

Finally, and most significantly, in the circumstances in which there was a single European currency and sterling remained outside, that single currency would become an international reserve currency which would be in almost every international portfolio. Sterling, on the other hand, would be considered a much more risky and volatile currency which was less desirable to hold. It follows, as night follows day, that international holders of sterling would demand a yield premium for holding it. What does that mean? Translated into ordinary language, it means high interest rates. We should be condemning ourselves to a regime of interest rates higher than those of our Community partners indefinitely. That position would be intolerable for any responsible Government of any party to accept.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minutes limit on speeches is now in operation.

7.9 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Joining the exchange rate mechanism was a preparation for and a first step towards economic and monetary union. It was a dummy run for a single currency. I am willing to give a prize to anyone who has seen any of the promised benefits from the exchange rate mechanism. One result is that we can no longer use interest rates for domestic purposes because virtually their sole purpose is to defend the exchange rate. Our domestic economy is crying out for a reduction in interest rates, but that is denied us because, contrary to the promise, the pound is insecure in its ERM band and few believe that it will be possible to hold it there.

In the meantime, the high interest rates push us further into recession, as the rapidly growing number of unemployed know to their cost. Already, the ERM is doing great damage to our economy. The rate of DM2·95 is becoming ever more unrealistic and the pound is becoming artificially high. The ERM now puts a price surcharge on all our exports.

We must ask ourselves how we are to close our trade deficit, especially that with Germany. It is a delusion to think that we can do it in time by supply side measures, and by education and training alone. We shall not, by some miracle, reduce our unit labour costs and increase our productivity and our output per head faster than the Germans or quickly enough, if at all, to achieve that in the foreseeable future.

There are only two main methods of approach. First, we can allow the exchange rate to be altered to a more competitive level; or secondly, we can have deflation which pushes the economy into recession and thus reduces the demand for imports, and is what we are doing now. That is graveyard economics, which is grossly inefficient and socially unjust. It reduces output, causes unemployment and hits those who are made redundant and those in manufacturing industries.

If the exchange rate cannot be altered, as we heard from the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), the method of adjustment has to be real wage reduction. We are already being told that ERM means that wages must not go up with inflation. Whose wages are to be reduced? It is those of the workers in manufacturing and in the traded goods sector. It is the blue collar workers and not the people in the City who will be hit hardest. The dummy run of the ERM is already doing us great damage.

After years of talk about what economic and monetary union might mean, and about whether it might mean anything or nothing, we are coming to decision time. At the inter-governmental conference, there are new treaties and the blueprint to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) referred. We now know what that means. It means a single currency and a single monetary policy because there is no subsidiarity in monetary policy; monetary policy is indivisible. It means a single currency and a single

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

monetary policy controlled by an unaccountable central bank. Inevitably, we should hand over powers over economic affairs, over budgets and over taxation to traditionally conservative central bankers, which would involve a huge loss of democratic self-government.

Control over taxes will go, both because of Commission policy, to which hon. Members have already referred, which talks about the co-ordination of tax policy, and because of market forces. If we are to have the so-called "level playing field", capital will move to where it will get the highest return and to where taxes are lowest. With a single currency and unrestricted capital flows, it would be a delusion to think that the Government could exercise their taxation policies to promote egalitarian or expansionist aims that do not have the support of international financiers.

Why should we want all this ? The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding said that we should have lower transaction costs. If that is the reason, why do we not go for a world currency? Economic and monetary union will not reduce transaction costs with the yen or with the dollar. Transaction costs, even in the European Community, are unlikely to disappear, because banks will still incur costs when they transfer money from one country to another. In the United States, clearing cheques from one state to another still costs money.

The costs to this country in lost jobs, in lost prosperity and in lost output far outweigh any alleged gains on transaction costs. Anyone who imagines that a single currency is merely a technical matter which always brings benefits should look, as has been suggested previously, at what has happened in Germany with German monetary union. Otto Pöhl of the German Bundesbank said that it was economic and monetary union in a nutshell. I like to call it monetary union in a laboratory experiment.

What was the effect of monetary union on two economies with different rates of productivity? It was lethal. It was a death blow for German industry and brought mass unemployment. The introduction of the deutschmark did more damage more quickly than a dozen panzer divisions could have done. The west Germans are now pouring in trillions of deutschmarks to rescue the economy of the German Democratic Republic, which is a country of only 18 million people.

The east Germans are lucky; they have a rich big brother who rescues his kith and kin. Even that is putting a big strain on the west German economy. Are the Germans really likely to do the same for us, for Greece, for Portugal and for Spain? Would they do it for the other eastern European countries? Of course not. We shall be on our own, bearing the full brunt of the cost.

I am brought to another realisation. Economic and monetary union will divide Europe; it will not unite Europe. It will be a barrier to enlargement. The struggling new democracies of eastern Europe could not cope with a single currency or with economic and monetary union. They have seen what it has done already to the GDR which, after all, was the most advanced country in COMECON. Those countries have no big brother to bail them out. Those who want EMU do not want enlargement. The French want to institutionalise their arrangements with Germany; they are not worried about bringing in the eastern European countries.

I want to emphasise that we are missing a major opportunity by concentrating on the wrong agenda. We should be considering how we react to the end of the cold war and to the democratisation of central and eastern Europe. Our response is hopelessly inadequate. Here is a chance to unite the whole of Europe in an association of democratic, self-governing states with the sort of vision that we had with the Marshall plan. Instead of that, we are constructing an exclusive ghetto in western Europe on a basis that will shut out half Europe. We are throwing away the chance to put a permanent end to the post-war division of our continent. Having removed the Berlin wall and the physical barriers, we are now re-erecting damaging economic barriers right across Europe in a way that will abandon and impoverish the struggling countries of eastern and central Europe.

Everyone says that there can be no EMU without convergence—without levelling out the differences of economic circumstances. We are told that there must be convergence in growth, in interest rates, in inflation rates, in productivity, in wealth, in standards of living, in budget deficits and in trade balances. Unless that is done, there will be dislocation because the level playing field will be a battlefield. There will be winners and losers. Whole regions with weaker economies could be blighted and turned into depressed areas with mass unemployment and closed industries. At present, there is not convergence but divergence, because the process of capital accumulation and of labour migration—in other words, market forces —tends, uncorrected, towards the cumulative reinforcement of those differences. The rich areas get richer and the poor areas get poorer.

What is the answer? Everyone says that it is regional policy. Having uttered those words, they think that they have solved the problem. They do not examine what regional policy would mean. I do not have time to go into the way public expenditure is redistributive or to consider how existing federations, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany, have horizontal transfers of wealth. The budgets of most countries in the European Community take about 45 per cent. of gross domestic product. The European Community budget is about 1 per cent. The wealth and the resources for a regional policy are not there.

The present regional fund is derisory. In 1990, the European regional fund had a budget of 4·7 billion ecu, which is £3·5 billion. That is 0·1 per cent. of the collective gross domestic product. Sir Donald MacDougall said that a budget of 7 per cent. devoted solely to regional policy was needed. That is a budget 70 times bigger than the existing budget.

One way to approach this is to look at Northern Ireland, where in our regional policy we spend £1·7 billion. That works out at £1,100 per head. There are 140 million people in the areas eligible for regional fund assistance in the European Community. If we had a policy there of £1,100 per head it would work out at £154 billion—4·6 per cent. of GDP. Currently it is £3·5 billion. Instead of the £154 billion which we would need to do there what we are doing for Northern Ireland, the budget is only £3·5 billion. So we would have to spend more than 44 times as much.

There is no chance of getting that sort of regional policy, and Conservative Members are opposed to it anyway.

7.20 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): The Government are absolutely right vigorously to resist the formation of a single European currency. From the point of view of Britain's national interest, it is living dangerously enough to artificially link our currency to that of another country, as we did, for instance, in the 1920s, through the gold standard, to the dollar, and, as we do today, through the exchange rate mechanism, to the deutschmark. But, as was the case in the 1920s, in these circumstances at least we retain a semblance of national sovereignty—so that if, for instance, unit costs of our industry are high in relation to those of the country with which we have chosen to link ourselves and there is therefore pressure on the artificially chosen exchange rate, we have the option of deflating the economy, as was done —with, it has to be said, disastrous effects—under the gold standard.

However, we also have the choice, in the present circumstances, of realigning our currency. That does not necessarily mean, as the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, devaluing all the time. That is a very pessimistic view of the future of our country. It is a question of allowing our rate of exchange to reflect accurately relative unit costs; and, as we get more efficient, it may well mean revaluation. We also have the option, in the present circumstances, of pulling out of the artificial straitjacket altogether, as was done in the case of the gold standard.

If, however, we were to adopt a single European currency, we would be left with no semblance of national sovereignty. Contrary to what the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), said, this cannot be fudged. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) said earlier, a single currency means a single Government. It cannot be any other way. A single currency requires a single policy towards inflation. It therefore requires a single budget, a single monetary policy, and a single tax-making authority.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mr. Spicer: I shall not give way, because my hon. Friend had 20 minutes and I have only 10 minutes.

Of course, a proportion of the tax-making decisions could be devolved to member states, but the overall budgetary authority could not. The argument is made that in pooling our sovereignty we would, as a nation within a European monetary union, grow in stature and wax in world influence. There might, I suppose, be some merit in this view if it could be shown that we shared some overwhelming common purpose with the other nations of Europe which justified our joining them to become, in effect, one country, because that is the logic of what is involved in a single currency.

Mention has already been made in the House today of the apparent lack of common purpose among European countries in the Gulf. I recognise, of course, that some of my hon. Friends and some hon. Gentlemen have drawn different inferences from this, but the issue, in my view, goes deeper even than whether the European countries are willing to supply us with spare parts for our forces fighting for international security. The fact is that we are different nations in Europe, with differing interests, requiring different economic and monetary policies. Britain, for instance, still exports more per head of its population than does Japan. Therefore, in terms of narrow economic self-interest alone, there must be great British concern to maintain strong bilateral links with the rest of the world.

That does not mean that we should not continue to strengthen our economic ties with Europe. In particular, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) said in an intervention, we should be pressing hard for a free flow of capital around Europe. We have not begun to have that in many respects. We should be pressing for fully convertible currencies reflecting not some artificial exchange rate but the unit cost differences between the various countries. But a pre-emptive leap towards federalism through the medium of a single currency would be, to say the least, premature.

7.27 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The enthusiasm for economic and monetary union demonstrated by pro-European, pro-market Members or even by our Front Benchers shows a willingness to throw away vital weapons of economic management as a badge of communautaire identity. It is a defiance of the basic principles of economics. The exchange rate is simply a market clearing mechanism. The competitive exchange rate in that situation is simply the rate at which a nation can trade, balance its payments and sustain that balance of payments in conditions of full employment and sustainable economic growth.

That is a market decision. We can influence the market and the exchange rate by high interest rates. The present Government have continually maintained the exchange rate too high by interest rates. We can do it by the way we run the economy. The point is that the exchange rate is essential to our trading ability. For proof of that, one need only look at the balance of payments of this country's manufacturing trade with the United States in 1986, when we had a substantial surplus of about £1 billion, and the deficit that we had last year of about £3 billion simply because the dollar had gone down and the pound had gone up since 1986. The exchange rate is absolutely vital.

I accept that there are divergent interests in connection with the exchange rate. Financial interests in this country want it high. Clearly, as they want to invest more overseas, they want a high and stable rate; while industry wants a low, competitive exchange rate so that it can produce more and sell it overseas. The rich, who have money, want a high exchange rate. The mass of the people, who want jobs, industry and economic expansion, need it to be competitive, and that is the interest of the Labour party.

It therefore follows that it was folly to enter the exchange rate mechanism. It was folly, first, to attach ourselves to fixed exchange rates, the bad old system; we are attempting to fix the needle on the barometer. The markets should decide that. This is not an argument for devaluation; it is an argument for markets. I cannot understand why a Government so attached to markets should want to defy markets on the exchange rate—the central issue. We cannot fix the needle on the barometer and control the weather. It just cannot be done. Also, we cannot transfer control over that vital exchange rate to competitors who have a vested interest in seeing us overvalued so as to sustain their access to our market. That is the second folly.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

The third folly is to go in at an overvalued rate, a rate that is substantially up on the level of the last quarter to 1986—about 23 per cent.—against the deutschmark. It is no use preaching to people to hold wages. If manufacturing industry's workers took a cut in wages, that still could not get us back to the competitive level of the last quarter of 1986. We have embarked on the folly, with the same consequences that Keynes described in "Economic Consequences of Mr. Churchill", attached to our return to the gold standard at an overvalued rate in 1925.

The consequences are now the same—increasing unemployment and bankruptcies, a reduction of taxation because corporation tax will be down, and increases in spending because unemployment will be up, so Government surplus moves into Government deficit and the economy winds down. We are screwing down the lid on the recession on which we embarked. That is disastrous when one considers that our manufacturing output is scarcely higher than it was in 1973.

It was a folly to enter the exchange rate mechanism, and a folly about which the Labour party should have warned. We said that we should enter at a competitive rate, but we kept terribly quiet when the Government went in at an uncompetitive rate. The consequences will be ruinous. If this country is to succeed, and if we are to stop the remorseless wind-down into depression and the rise in unemployment, there must be a substantial devaluation. It will come. We shall try to hold back the tide on the mentality that, at this stage in the economic cycle we need a futile gesture—that is certainly what the City wants—but it will come, and better that it comes early rather than late.

Economic and monetary union is a further step down the same road to folly. The currency is rather like the atmosphere around a planet—the framework that sustains life. It sustains independent economic life.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It is like the climate.

Mr. Mitchell: It is like the climate in that sense. That is the role of the exchange rate. We cannot abolish it without disastrous consequences for the life that is sustained in that climate. Hon. Members have argued that transaction costs will come down—a huge gain, particularly when we are in deficit. Transaction costs come down for importers as well as for exporters, and with us in substantial deficit that is paying a benefit to them. Sam Brittan argued in the *Financial Times* that the balance of payments vanishes, and so it does. It vanishes because we must then cut our ability to buy imports to our ability to produce exports to pay for them. We must cut our wages and our standard of living.

That is why it is so extraordinary that the Labour Front Bench should advocate membership of economic monetary union. The consequences of that fall on workers in manufacturing—those on the industrial front line. We are actually shelling our own front line in the industrial war. It will be used to depress, deflate and break the power of the unions and the working class—to increase unemployment—and the consequences of that will fall on manufacturing industry, our front line. Our standard of living will be driven down. We shall become another East Germany. The consequences of one currency for East Germany have been disastrous in terms of employment, jobs and manufacturing. They have big brother to help them out and cushion the blow, but we shall not.

Some people say, "Let us have a machinery for redistribution." I ask those who are enthusiastic about economic and monetary union, "Why concede the principle before the framework of redistribution is agreed? It will be difficult to get it. There will have to be massive transfers on the scale that Opposition Members have indicated. That will require a huge bill to be paid by Germany. Is Germany going to pay it? Is the SPD so enthusiastic about Britain's future that it is prepared to impose those taxes—those burdens—on the German economy? Do our politicians want to turn us into the plangent, begging, scrounging nation of Europe, dependent on handouts and regional aid for our economic existence because we abolished the atmosphere that sustained our own economy? Is that a future for a great and powerful nation? Is that a future on which we can build socialism and a better society? It is not.

That is not Labour party policy, either. Policy, as adopted by conference in "Meet The Challenge, Make The Change", is of opposition to economic and monetary union. That policy was accepted by conference and put forward by our Front Bench. Our leader told us in "Looking To The Future" that its commitments are still binding. It cannot be changed until conference changes it. I am therefore espousing Labour party policy on this issue.

I did not enter the Labour party or Parliament to institute a system of rule by central bankers over this country. I entered Parliament to build a fairer society in this country by providing full employment, building our national economic and industrial strength because the nation depends on its industrial base. It does not depend on mythology or sovereignty. I entered politics to multiply well-being and to get a better life for our people. We do that by developing and building industrial strength, by generating growth and distributing it fairly among our people.

In other words, economic growth is central to my philosophy. It will not be available in the new regime of economic and monetary union. I entered politics to build a better society, not to institute a system of rule by central bankers or to ensure that east Germany is builded here in England's green and pleasant land.

7.37 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): There is something to be said for a single currency. Convenience in transactions has already been mentioned. However, I do not believe that convenience is everything. Nobody now argues that a move to a single currency based on the present basket of currencies does not mean the convergence of economies within the European Community. Delors has said that and the Bundesbank has said that—indeed, the Bundesbank made the point that there should be no artificial deadline before economic convergence is achieved, and it sees it going a long way ahead; otherwise, the single currency cannot conceivably bear the weight placed upon it. Surely the Bundesbank should know. From figures that it has given, I understand that the net public sector borrowing requirement last year was DM100 billion. This year, it is due to go to DM140 billion because of the cost of restoring East Germany.

If anyone suggested that we should have such an enormous increase in our public sector borrowing requirement, we would be absolutely horrified. It is the kind of thing to which we are accustomed under Labour Governments. For that to happen in Germany is truly astonishing. However, if that is happening in the strongest economy in Europe, what about less well-endowed countries such as Greece and Italy with their enormous financial deficits? What would it cost to correct such enormous imbalances, and who is to bear that cost? If there is to be a more equal performance on the part of all European countries, the inescapable consequence will be a large Government transfer from one country to another.

Of course, that is called the European regional policy. It means a substantial transfer of money from one country to another. I note that, already, the French are calling for Mr. Solomon Binding who advises incomes policy to be run by the Community. I have no objection to the transfer of funds from one country to another, but that should be done by removing barriers to investment—just what 1992 is supposed to be about.

There will be a call for massive funds to be transferred from richer countries to poorer countries in the European Community. That will inevitably mean higher taxation. Worse, it will mean moving gradually to a command economy, no doubt run by Brussels with substantial offices in other European countries. Our experience—surely it is that of eastern Europe as well—is that the more we move to a command economy—the more we move from people, and the market—the more certain we are to fail, and fail we will.

There are other political consequences of a single currency and further centralisation of economic decision making—which is necessary to make a single currency work. At the least, eastern European countries will not be welcomed into the Community, because a substantial transfer of resources will be necessary to keep the single currency in being. Some issues are larger than the single currency, and one is the unity of Europe in the sense of a Europe sans frontières in which there is free movement of capital, goods and services. If imposing a single currency means that we have to deny the countries of eastern Europe any prospect of joining the Community, then the price is too high to pay. A single currency cannot be an objective in itself, except in a limited sense. It must be the servant of the political and economic system that we want, not its master.

We must take into account how the Community deals with matters which affect all its members. I have only to refer to the common agricultural policy and my hon. Friends will know what I mean. The way in which the GATT negotiations have proceeded is a disgrace. And what would happen if Britain wished to support the United Nations against another Saddam Hussein? Would we be told that, in order not to exert too much strain on the single currency, we must find savings elsewhere in our budget to accommodate extra defence spending? That is unthinkable.

How then are we to satisfy the demand for a single currency without accepting a centralised economic and political structure close to the lowest common denominator—which the current proposal would produce? The hard ecu is designed to satisfy that demand. It is a common parallel currency, not a single currency. It is subject to a central bank and run by central bankers, not politicians. It is one alternative suggested by my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I for one would be glad to see the central bank run by central bankers, not politicians, regardless of the Opposition's view.

By definition, the hard ecu cannot be expansionary or inflationary. It could be a substitute for national currencies rather than an addition to them. Just as the gold standard allowed de facto monetary union, there could be convertibility into the hard ecu as and when people, businesses and, lastly, countries wanted it. That time has plainly not yet come.

The process cannot be hurried. It is not a decision that we in Parliament can take. It will take much longer to establish the conditions for a single currency than the most enthusiastic Community supporters accept. It is much better to establish the Europe that we wish to see—outward-looking, free of internal barriers, in favour of free trade and ready to accept our responsibilities in the middle east and elsewhere under the auspices of the United Nations, and then fashion a common currency that will allow us to pursue those ends.

7.42 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): With the war going on in the Gulf, it may seem to people outside the House that it is a luxury to indulge in a debate on the finer points of economic and monetary union. But behind the images of war on the television screen, the economic picture is continuing to worsen. Recent high unemployment figures hardly got a look in on the news. Interest rates are still high and result in regular bankruptcies and redundancies in our constituencies. We have a declining manufacturing base and a massive balance of trade deficit. That means increasing unemployment and poverty in many of our constituencies.

The Government's policy on economic and monetary union affects that underlying agenda. At the centre of the Government's approach there seems to be a deliberate ambiguity. The current new-look Conservative leadership attempts to present a pro-EMU stand. Effectively, it is hedging on developments leading to economic and monetary union. More crucially, it is blocking moves to Community convergence in social, regional and economic policies.

The Government still insist on a hard ecu. Today we heard that it would not be subject to devaluation, but it is hard to see how that could be avoided if the Government intend that it should eventually emerge into a common currency. The Government still persist with their hard ecu fig leaf. The key problem is that the hard ecu scheme would not do what most other EMS countries want. The Government's latest proposals on the hard ecu concede the concept of an independent central bank but do not address the key issue of who will make key decisions on monetary policy. Even if the hard ecu worked, there would still be a strong possibility that an unreconstructed Bundesbank would remain firmly in charge.

The Government's proposals for beyond stage 1, published in January, make it clear that the EMS is to be entirely controlled by bankers. They propose that the shape will mirror the structure of the existing Bundesbank. They do not propose that the European monetary fund should be properly politically accountable from the beginning. We insist that it should be. The Government are struggling to remain on the fence on the independence of the European monetary fund or central bank system. In

[Mr. John Battle]

practice the Government are voting for continued control by the Bundesbank. In reality, if the commitment to the exchange rate mechanism is respected, national monetary sovereignty will prove to be a fiction.

The Government and others speak of defending the national interest, but in financial and economic terms, national sovereignty is already a fiction. How else can we explain that, in 1989, even before we joined the ERM, Britain was forced to raise interest rates to keep in line with the Germans? It could be argued that common interest through a European central bank accountable to all member states would give us more power over monetary conditions than we have now. At present, economic policy is effectively dictated by the Bundesbank.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer stressed that the Delors proposals dealt with uncertainties which were difficult to predict and that there were no precedents in history. He even suggested that the Bretton Woods agreement could not be quoted as a precedent. However, it is worth reflecting on the Bretton Woods agreement as a precedent of a sort.

The original proposals by Lord Keynes for a world central bank to manage a world reserve asset was sabotaged by the United States on the ground that it did not want to surrender its sovereignty over monetary policy. We were left with the existing international monetary fund which plugs economies driven by market forces, despite the fact that they suffer from high interest rates, high inflation and high unemployment and massive balance of trade deficits—hardly recommended models for developing countries. That is what emerged from the Bretton Woods agreement, and it is worth remembering that the United States resisted it on the ground of sovereignty.

If national sovereignty in financial and economic affairs in a world of international financial exchanges is a fiction, it is not too much to imagine that, by the year 2020, local and regional centres of power will be increasingly connected to international centres. That may formulate the axis of power. The role of national parliaments may diminish within the next 50 or 100 years. We should not fear that but face up to it and what it could mean in terms of democratic and internationalist politics.

Another overworked fiction is the mechanism of the market. Today the Prime Minister said that the hard ecu would be driven by the market and not imposed on anyone. He spoke as if market forces had a life of their own, entirely autonomous of human influence and decision. But the Chancellor said that he would work with the market. He implied that the hard ecu would not be so subject to the forces of the market as the Prime Minister suggested. However, there is a dominating fiction that the iron laws of the market exist in a determinist sense, which suggests that we must be committed to an arithmetical equation. We are dictated to by the vagaries of market forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) drew a parallel with the weather. Perhaps it has not occurred to him that clouds can be seeded and climate can be influenced and changed. We do not need to be subject to these determinist laws. In assenting to that, the Government reject any positive role in the plan for an active transition to a single market in economic, social and monetary policy.

The new pro-EMU stance of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor is cast and set in the language of free market forces, with the hard ecu as the only iron in the fire. The Government's approach is deliberately to neglect, if not be downright hostile to, the wider agenda set by the Delors report. In particular, they neglect the need for substantial social and economic convergence between member states before monetary union can take place.

Some Conservative Members have suggested, as I think the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) did, that convergence is geographically impossible and unnatural. But surely he and others would accept that, at the very minimum, it is important to prevent increasingly widening divergences that would damage all Community members. Convergences should be not only in terms of inflation, as even the Chancellor accepts, but in terms of ability to gain sustained, balanced growth and development for all in the Community.

The Cecchini report of economic experts on the benefits of the single market, drawn up in 1988, states:

"If the new rewards are not shared fairly, the EC home market will rest on a brittle skein of regional and social tensions . . . Undoubtedly . . . assistance will be needed for the Community's declining regions and labour affected by industrial restructuring."

It continues:

"there is a need to examine the sector by sector impact of removing non-tariff barriers and to envisage accompanying social policy measures across a range of fields: vocational training and mobility; labour market flexibility; and the more intensive use of the Community's social and regional funds. The extent to which the 1992 programme can attract economic and social cohesion around it will be the key to its chances of success."

Most recently, some economists have drawn attention to the fact that technology changes in the 1990s could have as devastating effect on employment in the service sectors of Community countries as de-industrialisation had on manufacturing in the late 1970s and 1980s. But at least and at last, employment needs, inequality and poverty issues are getting on to the agenda. Some 14 per cent. of the Community's population lives in poverty which, as we all know, is unevenly distributed throughout the Community, as German reunification graphically demonstrates at present.

There has already been some welcome response to poverty and social needs in the restructuring of funds, such as the European regional development fund. But the real trends of divergent development between European towns and cities continues, increases and needs to be tackled. References to free flow of capital must be matched by references to the movement of labour within the European Community. There is a real danger that all that will happen in 1992 is that the divergent trend between skilled and unskilled labour will be reinforced.

We must face up to the mobility implications of that divergence because professional and skilled people will freely move in and out of major European cities and benefit them, but those northern cities that are in decline will lose their populations as unskilled and semi-skilled labour heads off in search of work. The result will be a growing polarisation between rich and poor within the Community. Unless that issue is addressed, moving in the direction of economic and monetary union alone will be of no benefit.

7.55 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): This is an important debate, and one of the problems is that we are talking about economic and monetary union rather than trying to separate them. There is a distinction between the two; it is possible to have monetary union, with a large degree of discretion and flexibility for Governments in economic and fiscal matters.

Economic union is already being advanced in the European Community, with the support of the British Government, through the single market programme. I for one welcome the Commission's announcement, in its report issued earlier this month, that it is aware that some countries are not applying the single market programme with the same efficiency as this Government and will start proceedings against those Governments. The House will welcome that; it is a good, high priority in the Commission's plans for this year. Economic union will flow from the completion of the single market programme, which does not need to contain fiscal harmonisation or managing, on a statutory basis, budgetary deficits between member countries. Therefore, I do not believe that many hon. Members would oppose economic union, which is certainly very much part of the Government's clear policy.

Monetary union has been more controversial. However, there is now a series of basic agreements on policy between most Governments in the Community that create a favourable atmosphere for discussions in the inter governmental conference. For example, there is general agreement on the value of stable monetary supply, stable prices, low inflation and, crucially, an understanding—unfortunately not shared by some Opposition Members—that there is no value in policies resulting in devaluation. The depreciation of the currency is not, in itself, a merit. The important point is that we in this country have so often had surreptitious impoverishment because we have allowed reduction in the value of our currency without consideration of the fundamental issue of how to improve the competitiveness of our industrial performance. The need to avoid devaluation is understood throughout the Community.

The ERM has been remarkably successful, and I welcome our entry of it. All of us would like interest rates to fall in this country. Those who approach that aim by saying that we must challenge the central rate of sterling in the ERM at DM2·95 do a great disservice to the efforts to reduce interest rates. As long as there is uncertainty about the British Government's determination to hold the DM2·95 level, there will need to be a premium on sterling in terms of interest rates. The greater the confidence that we are determined at all costs and at all times to maintain the DM2·95 central rate, the greater the confidence of people investing in sterling and thus a reduced need to have a high interest rate premium against the deutschmark. I urge those who agree with me that we want lower interest rates to cease to question the DM2·95 level; that would be a great service.

I think that the sooner we move to the 2·25 per cent. margin on either side of the central rate, the sooner we shall increase the likelihood that the market genuinely believes that the British Government are determined to crack inflation—not to resort to the antiquated device of depreciating currency. That would increase certainty, increase investors' confidence, and lead to a reduction in interest rates through a reduction in the premium necessary over the deutschmark.

There are other factors that assist in that, such as the technical rule that any movement of adjustment in the ERM, particularly when there is a smaller central rate margin, should not be done outside the existing rate. At present, there is a 6 per cent. band on either side and we should never move out of that range when resetting the central level of the 2·25 per cent. band. The strength of ERM could develop further by moving progressively downward in the band on either side of the central rate; 1·5 per cent. would be achievable. That would be an extremely beneficial move, and in this country's interests, in terms of reducing our interest rate premium.

The consensus that has emerged on various economic policies has also given rise to the need to bring convergence in the Community between the performance of the various economies. That is clearly an objective of all those involved in the discussions. The question is how to do it. That is where the hard ecu shows the role it can play. Setting a non-inflationary standard through the mechanism of the European monetary fund will provide the possibility of ensuring that good money chases out bad.

Therefore, any country pursuing profligate policies that lead to a tendency of its own currency to depreciate within the ERM bands will find that its citizens and businesses will opt for the harder currency—the ecu. That will be a disincentive to that Government, who will have to put their house in order. Therefore, over a period—one that is not easy to define but will be shorter than expected—there will be a convergence on a lower inflation rate throughout the Community. That will give the right basis for stable money and therefore monetary union.

It is important to understand what the Government have proposed. The European monetary fund will have teeth. It can force countries to make good the loss in value in their depreciating currency by purchasing hard currency. That is an important role for the EMF, and one that is deliberately anti-inflationary. Secondly, the EMF cannot increase total monetary supply within the Community because it can only issue the hard ecu against reserves from existing currencies. Therefore, the Germans' worry that the EMF and the hard ecu would increase inflation is unfounded, and I hope that we can get that argument across to the Bundesbank. The worry that it might make Bundesbank management of monetary supply more difficult is also unfounded, and I hope that our arguments on that will prevail.

The other interesting point about the proposals—there is a good deal of agreement with the Commission on this—is that there will be no bail-out of deficits built into the arrangements, as countries will not be able to print money to finance deficits. This is important, because if one has a common monetary policy throughout the Community—that will be achieved as the European monetary fund sets the conditions for monetary policy—each country will have some budgetary flexibility if it is creditworthy, and it will be creditworthy only if it is able to show that it has a sensible anti-inflationary policy.

Furthermore, such a country would be more exposed to criticism and assessment by lenders. Lenders will not lend to a country in whose policies they do not have confidence. However, if the policies are sound, lenders will be prepared to lend to that country, and that will give the Government substantial fiscal flexibility and sovereignty. As has been

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said, Germany is running a budgetary deficit of 5 per cent. of GDP. That is a remarkable increase, but people still believe that the German Government are pursuing anti-inflationary policies and are prepared to lend to Germany, so there has not been a significant change in German tax or interest rates.

The important point is that we have the European monetary fund as an institution to set monetary discipline. I do not see a great distinction between what the Government are proposing and what many of our friends on the continent wish. The European monetary fund could be the Euro Fed of the future. Our proposals could satisfy our friends because the common currency could lead to the single currency. In my view, the hard ecu is likely to be the safest and fastest route to the single currency, and I hope that our proposals will get more and more consent as the IGC continues.

8.3 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I shall pick up two of the points made by the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on which I came to a different conclusion. I have not yet heard an industrialist or anyone on the commercial sector say that the Government were right to enter the ERM at the rate of DM2·95 to the pound. I do not accept the view of those responsible about the need to keep interest rates high so as to maintain that exchange rate. They are kept high because the Government got it wrong in the first place, and now do not have the flexibility, which they would like, to reduce interest rates. I have met many industrialists, most of whom told me that the Government were wrong even before I asked. Going in at the wrong rate has put our manufacturing industries at a disadvantage and made imports cheaper. That gives the Government another problem to cope with in their efforts to get the economy right.

We fully accept the need to get inflation down and we recognise the importance of that to the economy. However, we believe that the Government fail to recognise the contribution to inflation of interest rates. The Government say that the guilty party in this is wage rates, but interest rates are a bigger contributing factor.

I support the line taken so ably by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I do so for two reasons. First, I am a regional Member of Parliament representing a constituency in the north-west. Secondly, I represent a constituency heavily involved in manufacturing industry. If we are to maintain our manufacturing industry, we should take the line set out by my right hon. and learned Friend, because that is the best way to protect manufacturing industry and secure job stability.

Because we are in the ERM and fast approaching 1992, with all that that implies, a single currency and European monetary union are inevitable. However, we should not be going along that line with a blank cheque approach, agreeing to every condition. We have to get everything right. When the Government went into the ERM, they did so in a panic, and fixed the rate wrongly. I should be far happier about my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and a Labour team negotiating those terms and conditions than I am about Conservative Ministers doing so, because we would look after the interests of Britain and the regions.

Last night, my right hon. and learned Friend and I were at a meeting with the general secretary of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, of which we are both members. He told us that the membership, at grass roots level, was pushing the union to take a far more positive approach to EMU and European matters. That change among the membership is because people working in industry believe that it is the best way to safeguard their future. Anyone who argues that we should not be moving in that direction has to recognise that we have lost so many jobs and that manufacturing industry has deteriorated so much in the past few years that we have to do something positive if we are to prevent a further decline.

My constituency is heavily involved in manufacturing, as is the north-west as a whole. However, despite what the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said at Question Time yesterday, investment in manufacturing has fallen by more than 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979, output is down by more than 30 per cent. and jobs in manufacturing are down 38 per cent. in the north west. Conservative Members like to call that an economic miracle, but it spells economic disaster for Burnley and the north-west.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said that manufacturing is the creator of wealth, and we want wealth to be created because we want to be able to get enough income for the future Labour Government to fund a more positive approach. We certainly want to encourage that. We believe that what is needed is a much more positive attitude to industry. It is also necessary that there be a much more positive attitude to the regions. The Conservative Government have used additionality against the regions. Only the British Government have operated it in that way, and it is something of which they should be absolutely ashamed.

Many industrialists have put very forcefully to me the point that the ability to trade in a single currency, without the need to be bothered about bankers' commission and so on, would make business considerably easier. We want to be able to compete in Europe on equal terms.

The number of jobs being lost at present may not be so great as the number lost in the early 1980s, but higher productivity means that those losses have a far greater impact in relative terms. That is a matter for concern.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just a loss of manufacturing jobs that we are seeing? In the north-west, substantial numbers of jobs are being lost with the closure of firms that were set up in the 1980s for the very purpose of replacing lost jobs. In other words, the so-called new employment prospects in the north-west are also being eroded.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The north-west has changed. Traditional industries have gone, and the new industries are suffering difficulties. Many of these are high-technology firms. It is sad that jobs are being lost there too.

We must enter the negotiations positively, although I realise that we may well encounter difficulties along the route. Perhaps, at some stages, there will emerge certain things that we are not prepared to accept. However—as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a prominent union member,

will realise—it is absolutely crucial to have a positive approach if one is to achieve a positive result. If our approach to a single currency and EMU is right, we should get the type of agreement that we want. We should be kidding ourselves if we believed that no other country in Europe would at any stage find some of the proposals unacceptable. As certain hon. Members have said, there will be times when Britain is not the odd man out.

The Opposition envisage Europe extending to include EFTA nations and some eastern European countries. If Europe is to play a positive role in the world—for example, in respect of the environment and the third world—we shall have to do everything we can to ensure that its economy, including the economy of this country, is as strong as possible. I believe that movement in the direction I have indicated would achieve that objective.

8.13 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The Gulf war that is going on at the moment has demonstrated a number of serious weaknesses in the way in which the European Community has been developing. In the context of this debate, it is important to remember that the system being proposed would effectively—through the interlocking of economic, monetary and eventually, I think, fiscal policy—have a dramatic effect on our capacity in future years to conduct a foreign policy such as we are engaged in now or a defence policy that would enable us to deal with a Saddam Hussein of the future.

I make this point with reference to the explanatory memorandum relating to the draft treaty on economic monetary union. I think that I am the only hon. Member —apart, perhaps, from Ministers—to have a copy. I do not want to go through it in detail, but I do want to quote these words:

"The joint exercise of new powers in areas in which reach to the very heart of sovereignty, such as currency matters and foreign policy, will require the existing institutional framework to be adapted to a higher degree of community integration."

It could be said by some, of course, that this is nothing more than a Commission document, which should not be taken too seriously. If one were to take a fairly relaxed view of these matters, one might adopt that attitude. On the other hand, the evidence of the engrenage that has taken place within the Community over the past 15 years indicates that the real muscle—the forward drive for the progressive realisation of economic and monetary union —has lain very much with the Commission. This is what some people believe to be progress.

It is therefore relevant, in the context of the current dramatic events in the middle east, to consider very briefly what would happen if we were faced with this interlocking monetary and economic system in relation to the proposal for a central bank, in which case we should have, effectively, unelected bankers running these policies. That would reduce our ability to determine the economic and social priorities, including defence. We should have to ask ourselves what impact that would have on our ability to respond to a threat similar to that posed by the activities of Saddam Hussein and Iraq.

Bearing in mind the fact that economic and monetary union, together with foreign policy, lies at the heart of the sovereignty question, I should like to mention that, at the meeting of Foreign Ministers on 4 January, Mr. Roland Dumas is reported by *The Economist* as having snapped:

"If the European Community had majority voting on foreign policy you would be outvoted."

One can therefore understand the relationship between political union and economic and monetary union. As has been said during the course of this debate, one cannot really separate them. For practical purposes, once one has moved to economic and monetary union one is on the threshold of, if not right into, political union.

We saw what happened yesterday in the European Parliament. A six-hour debate on the Gulf crisis broke up in confusion. Newspapers reported Mr. Jacques Delors as having put an imaginary pistol to his head and walked out in disgust. I do not take any pleasure in this, nor do I take any satisfaction in saying, as many hon. Members have said from time to time, "I thought that this might happen."

The reality is that it is a matter of immense importance for the future of this country that we should not make any mistakes in this respect. If, for example, the European Community, had a common defence policy—a proper defence policy along the lines of that of the United States —its current average expenditure of 3·1 per cent. of gross domestic product would have to be just about doubled. Incidentally, in the United Kingdom at the moment the figure is about 4 per cent. The extra resources would have to be produced via taxation, which would inevitably have to be drawn from the member states.

To achieve defence at the level of that of a country of equivalent standing, such as the United States, taxation would have to be raised to that extent through the processes of economic and monetary union and fiscal policy, and I just do not believe that the individual member states would wear that. Individual contributions for defence by way of the percentage of gross domestic product, are way below the British contribution. That is a point that we must bear in mind.

I repeat that there is nothing anti-European about my attitude to the various questions. I was the founding member of Westminster for Europe and I want the EC to work, but I do not want to see the whole thing disintegrate as a result of embarking on policies which are essentially impossible and unreal and which, in the context to which I have just referred, are potentially dangerous. I have no doubt that the British people, looking at the state of affairs in the Gulf and the almost non-existent contribution that has been made by other member states, would be deeply concerned if they thought that the proposals for EMU could or would have an impact on our defence policies in the Gulf or elsewhere in the future.

If there were an increase in the amount of money spent on defence in percentage terms, it follows that there would be a corresponding decrease in the amount of money available for other areas of public expenditure. That in turn would cause grave difficulties which would probably have something to do with the arguments that were raging in the European Parliament yesterday. There are serious questions about the economic, social, defence and public expenditure policies that would be pursued under the regime that has been postulated by the Commission in its draft treaty. The same could be said of the proposals for a single institutional structure, or political union, which have also come from the Commission.

Our proposals entitled "Possible treaty provisions and statute for a European monetary fund" were published in January 1991 and have been presented to the House. I put my observations in the form of questions, a number of which arise. For example, article II says:

[Mr. William Cash]

"The overriding objective of the European Monetary Fund shall be to promote and maintain price stability in the Community as part of the progressive realisation of Economic and Monetary Union."

It goes on to say:

"Without prejudice to the object of price stability"—

which many economists would say is extremely difficult to define, and is not well defined in any of the Commission documents, but is generally taken to mean that inflation will be kept as low as possible—

"the Fund shall support the other economic policy objectives of the Community."

The question is, what are the Community's economic policy objectives? Is there not an invitation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) suggested, to massage the present arrangements proposed under the document into what he would like, which is the Euro Fed arrangement.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer with whom I have had the pleasure of discussing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Mr. John Butterfill.

8.23 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): As chairman of the Conservative Group for Europe, I believe that it will come as no surprise to hon. Members that I hope that we will eventually evolve much closer unions within Europe, both politically and economically. Evolve is the important word. In recent times, some of our European partners have been trying to press things much farther and faster than most of their populations are prepared to tolerate or economic conditions within the Community can sustain.

I would go even further than my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) and say that, first, we must achieve economic union, as we are doing through the agency of the single market, but before we proceed to monetary union, we must have much closer political union, because the two things are inseparable. Unless we can achieve political agreement about the Community's general objectives, it will be impossible to achieve full monetary union. Therefore, to a great extent, we have been putting the cart before the horse; or, more importantly, the Delors committee has been putting the cart before the horse.

That is not altogether surprising because much of the motivation behind the Delors proposals was to achieve the political objective of pushing the Community's political union faster than it had gone hitherto. There is much to support that. Many leading statesmen within the Community accuse us of having no vision, but I do not believe that. I have just as much vision as they have, but I hope that I have a good deal more pragmatism.

Late last year, with some other hon. Members, I attended the interparliamentary convention in Rome and it became clear to me that many of those present wanted things to go much faster in all those areas than we had previously understood to be the case. Many brave words were spoken, particularly about political union. It is rather sad that recent events have shown that when it comes to the political crunch, for example with regard to the Gulf, those brave words have not been matched by brave deeds. I take no pleasure in that, but it is true, so we must take a much more measured approach in the way that we proceed on economic and, later, monetary union.

Having said that, are we doing the right thing? Have the Government taken the right approach? I believe that they have. I believe that, in joining the exchange rate mechanism at the central rate of DM2·95, they have got it right. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Esher that those who are continuing to speculate that that rate will have to come down in order to give some mythical assistance to British industry are doing nothing but delay the eventual reduction of interest rates which will occur as inflation reduces within the British economy, as I am confident will happen later this year.

We should always speak out against the siren voices that we have heard from the Opposition Benches saying that we must devalue our currency in order to assist our manufacturing industry. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have done that consistently ever since the last war, and it has got us nowhere. It is short-termism, and it is a road to ruin.

To see the proof of that one has only to look at the situation in those countries that have not followed that route. Exporters in Japan and West Germany have concentrated on quality, delivery, reliability and service to their customers and they have sold consistently better than we have despite the fact that their currencies have been appreciating in value. It is about time that Opposition Members learned that important lesson. It is sad that the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who is just leaving the Chamber, has not yet taken that on board.

Should we go along some of the routes suggested in the Delors report? For example, should we have independent central banks within the Community? Greater independence for central banks has a good deal to commend it. It would impose disciplines upon the management of the economy which are desirable and in accordance with Conservative thinking. It would prevent us from running the horrific budget deficits that we have seen in the past. It is perhaps no coincidence that the countries which have had to devalue within the ERM are those which run the highest budget deficits, one example being Italy. Therefore, there should be some rigour in the management of the economy and of detachment from short-term political considerations.

The market approach is the way forward. If we were to go down the line of redistribution within the economy and straight into a single currency, we would be forced back into the old systems of regional support which have served all of Europe, but especially this country, so badly. Previous policies of regional aid in this country were harmful to the development of the regions, because they created a dependency culture and the feeling that someone else would bail them out.

It was not until this Government came along and encouraged the regions to stand on their own feet, by harnessing the innate creativeness of the inhabitants with inward investment, which attracted foreign capital and capital from other parts of the country, that there was the dynamism which we now see in the Scottish and Welsh economies and the resurgence of the economy in the north. That is the way forward for the whole of Europe. It is no use creating dependency cultures all over Europe or talking about monetary union until we have achieved much greater economic convergence of all the regions within Europe.

The proposal of a hard ecu is beneficial and should be given greater consideration by our European partners. When I was in Germany in the latter part of last year, I too met Dr. von Wartenberg, the director general of the Federation of German Industry, who confirmed that it was an interesting proposal. He wished to change some of the original British proposals but felt that the hard ecu could work for the benefit of the whole of Europe. Therefore, we should proceed to develop with our European partners the proposals for a European monetary fund. It would impose market disciplines and counteract the centralist and interventionist proposals of the Commission which would be harmful.

Monetary union depends upon agreement among the members of the Community about where we all want to go and how we want to get there. It is no use putting the cart before the horse, as the Community has done to date. If we push it too fast, it will all end in tears. If we try to go down the route that we are being encouraged to go down by the Commission, we will create a structure which will be inherently unstable, which will lead to disaster for the less developed countries of the Community and which will bring the whole Community proposals into disrepute. It is clear that we do not yet have that agreement. Therefore, we must adopt a step-by-step approach.

8.33 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the debate as a chance for my hon. Friends on the Back Benches to contribute to the thinking of Ministers on economic and monetary union before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor goes to the IGC on 28 January. In his excellent opening speech, my right hon. Friend admirably met two of the requirements of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who suggested that the approach to these matters should be realistic and constructive.

That was a fair description of the approach of my right hon. Friend. As the House knows, he is advocating an evolutionary and practical approach to the next stages of economic and monetary union. Indeed, he need not have apologised for that, because those of us who have looked into the foundations of the European idea since the last war were aware of the famous phrase of Jean Monnet when he described his approach to these matters as "une politique de petits pas", a policy of small steps. There is no doubt that the incrementalism implied there is inherent in the Community method.

I understand very well why the previous Chancellor, now the Prime Minister, said that Governments could not accept the imposition of a single European currency since that would imply a political decision to do so taken against the wishes of at least one important member Government. Even though technically it might be possible for that to happen, it would be a disaster, and I cannot believe that in practice our Community partners, especially Germany which also has reservations about the Delors approach, would allow it since it would disrupt the cohesion of the Community at a time when it could not be more important for all Twelve to be united.

Therefore, I wish the Chancellor and his colleagues well in what is likely to be a long haul in terms of discussion and negotiation. Nevertheless, this is perhaps the right occasion to offer a few points of important detail arising from the text of the Government's proposals. I intend to devote my brief remarks to that end.

Taking first the Government's draft treaty articles, it is right that the objectives of the proposed European monetary fund should be the maintenance of price stability and consistency with free markets, as set out in article II. It is also right that the hard ecu should not be susceptible to devaluation in any circumstances since that would make it at least as attractive as the deutschmark and could offer an ingenious way of limiting, and eventually reducing, deutschmark dominance within the Community, without recourse to French-inspired supranationalism of the kind advocated by Mr. Delors.

When it comes to the exercise of the powers and duties of the European monetary fund, I would infinitely prefer alternative 1 in the Treasury paper to alternative 2 in draft article V. That is the only way to guarantee independence for the fund, and it should be done right from the beginning. It would be advisable for the following brief reasons. First, it is advisable to make the proposed new institution and its monetary policy as credible as possible in the eyes of markets. Independence would achieve that. That is the most important reason.

Secondly, it is advisable to make the new institution compatible with the established leading model—the Bundesbank in Germany—and thus attract vital German support in the negotiations. Thirdly, it is important to give the idea the best possible chance of meeting its two principal objectives—those laid down in article II. I realise that would entail a change from our existing approach to these matters.

Indeed, it would probably be sensible for us to legislate at about the same time to put the Bank of England on a new basis of statutory accountability to the House. I sought to pursue that point with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. I would welcome such a change which would make our arrangements institutionally compatible with the arrangements that we can expect to emerge within the Community. It would not erode the sovereignty of the House in monetary matters—quite the reverse, since under the existing arrangements, dating back at least to the Bank of England Act 1946, not even the Cabinet, let alone the House, has effective control over national monetary policy.

It would impose on the Bank of England a duty of periodic accountability to the House for the conduct of monetary policy, at least for the day-to-day administration of that policy, by obliging the bank to give perhaps a quarterly retrospective account of its stewardship. As I sought to say in my intervention, it would be for the European Parliament to provide the necessary statutory accountability for the proposed European monetary fund in the manner suggested in article IX of the draft text. This House should have a more established role in monitoring the administration of the Bank of England.

Furthermore, I believe that the Government are right to suggest in article VII in the draft text that, in the event of infringement by a member state or a national bank, it should be for the executive board of the European monetary fund to bring the matter before the European Court of Justice. That is a wise principle—that independent monetary arrangements for Europe should be reviewed, and disciplined if necessary, by the already functioning independent judicial arrangements of the

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

European Court of Justice. I would not expect such sanctions to be used very often, but it is important that they should be available.

The combination of legal accountability to the European Court of Justice and political accountability to the European Parliament is the right one for the European monetary fund. It is then up to this House rather than the Government of the day to provide a statutory framework of accountability for a much more independent Bank of England.

I believe that the House should welcome these proposals rather than take fright at them. We should start from a recognition that the days of real monetary autonomy for any single nation state or national parliament are long gone. We should therefore move forward pragmatically in discussions with our partners on the basis of these proposals, making it clear all the time that our ideas could evolve towards the establishment of a single European currency by mutual consent and in response to market forces.

If we do this we could find not only that we win the argument at the intergovernmental conference, but also that our partners will accept the idea of having a British president of the governing board of the European monetary fund which, for gastronomic and other reasons, should be located in Paris.

8.41 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): My starting points for my short contribution to today's debate are two quotations. The first is from an address by Leon Brittan last year to the TSB and published under the title "European Monetary Union—What Money for Europe?" He said:

"there is nothing mystical about national currencies—or international ones for that matter. I am in favour of those arrangements which make our economy work better, and so provide more prosperity and more jobs; and against any changes which do not make economic sense. If, therefore, Britain is better off with its own currency not all the tea in China or even all the directives in Brussels would convince me that it is right to give up that currency."

That seemed to me a pretty sensible base from which to begin one's exploration of this issue. Money is a tool in the service of the economy and one which evolves over time. No one would argue with that.

The second quotation is from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), speaking in the House in a debate on the exchange rate mechanism on 23 October last year, when he said that he entirely agreed with his right hon. Friend the then Chancellor of the Exchequer that

"there is a world of difference between EMS, which is an aspect of economic management, and EMU, which is essentially political."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 216.]

It is the political aspect of European monetary union that I would like to explore a little. This has been a wide-ranging debate which has enabled us to cover these matters well. I would like to add something on the political aspect, particularly in relation to the issues of sovereignty and the co-operation of European states.

In early November of last year, I was given an opportunity to visit France by the French Government, whom I thank most warmly. I sought to explore the then very strong-running controversy of sovereignty, which was thought by many, both then and now, to be at the heart of the issue of European monetary union. Two questions were uppermost in my mind.

The first was why, bearing in mind just how strong were our feelings on sovereignty, the French were not similarly concerned. Whatever differences we may have, there is no doubt that as a nation state France is as proud and patriotic as we are. Why were the French not up in arms about the possible loss of sovereignty in relation to their currency?

The broad answer that I picked up to this question was that the French consider this argument to be old hat. About 10 years or so ago, it had been much explored, but a consensus had emerged that sovereignty was enhanced through greater involvement in Europe and that European decisions would on the whole be with, rather than against, French interests. They expected this to be the case because they expected to have influence at both political and diplomatic levels. There are lessons there for those who neither expected nor tried to have such influence. Subsequent experience has shown the French that this decision has been broadly correct and they were therefore generally content to move towards a single currency.

At this stage I put in two caveats. It was the view of one leading French journalist that the French were perhaps too unquestioning about the whole business. He thought that sovereignty was an important issue and, while he did not necessarily disagree with the broad consensus in France, he did not believe that either politicians or public were asking the right questions.

The second caveat is that the French system invests rather more executive power in its President than in its Parliament; but, provided that the decision-making system of the European Community allowed for the president to exercise such Executive powers at the highest level, it was felt that the system would be workable. Such veto power is indicative of their desire, as on the Government Benches here, to avoid a completely federal system and to retain the power of the the nation state in some way.

The second question that I wanted to explore, particularly with politicians, was an economic one. Was not the major thrust of European Community economic policy, the common agricultural policy excepted since it is under reform, far from being socialism in disguise, innately market-oriented? Did not the ERM, and future EMU, strengthen this, thus locking political parties of both left and right into a broadly free market economy, limiting shifts in both politics and economics to slightly left and slightly right of centre?

In putting this view to politicians of the right, I was seeking to see whether they shared the reservation sometimes expressed on these Benches that Europe was inevitably moving towards a corporate socialist future. I do not hold such a view, and nor do they. They can see no reason why Conservative politicians should not welcome the growing convergence of European economic policy, because, with the single European market well established, it is inevitable that the economic policy of the Europe of the future will be so market-oriented that socialism as we had come to know it in our country will be effectively impossible to implement.

Putting the question slightly differently to the socialist representative that I met, I was given a slightly different answer. He also recognised that the socialism that we had come to know and be amused by in this country was not

truly possible in the Europe of the future, but he certainly believed that socialist social aspirations could be achieved. He was quite prepared to work within the economic boundaries being set, and of course he had a rueful experience upon which to draw.

This reflects a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) in talking about the relative autonomy of any country these days. The experience of socialist France in the early 1980s, when it tried a sort of "go it alone" economic policy, proved to be a disaster. France, it appeared, was already locked into the economic system of others. He recognised, therefore, that his sovereignty and freedom of action, like ours, was already limited. That is a lesson to which I will return in a few moments. From these discussions I drew two particular conclusions.

First, as well as economic convergence in Europe being necessary over the coming years, the French had a feeling that there was already a growing social and political convergence throughout Europe. Putting it in bold terms —I welcome both developments—they saw that we were heading towards the firm establishment of a social market economy throughout the European Community, and a broadly social democratic political philosophy, in which Governments of either centre-right or centre-left would be perfectly comfortable, but those of more extreme views on either side less comfortable, and indeed far less likely to be elected.

Secondly, I believe that the recent history of Europe has left its mark on continental Europe and those islands in quite a different way, and this is partly responsible for our discomfort with moves towards political and economic unity, and their different approach to sovereignty. The experience of the second world war in continental Europe and these islands was different in one major and fundamental respect. Almost every other continental European country suffered the experience of occupation. I do not believe that we in this country have any real conception of what a miserable existence that must be. However, one has only to spend a moment on the continent to understand just how significant it was in their lives and their memories. Their whole political and cultural thrust has been to ensure that such a thing never happens again.

Extreme nationalism—not pride in one's nation, as we know it—was at the heart of their agony and distress. Working to eliminate the bad things of nationalism has therefore been of prime importance—hence the drive towards a unity which may not be fully fleshed out yet but is immensely powerful in its influence. The British resistance to this over the years seems to have had behind it a hesitation, that if the balloon went up again in continental Europe and there was some disaster similar to that of pre-war Europe, there would for us be a way out. We would not have burned our bridges so as to tie us into a disaster. Continental Europe says that all activities are designed to ensure that the balloon never goes up in the first place, and that our influence and determination is needed to ensure that that does not happen. By increasing our level of involvement and commitment, we can ensure that what we fear, and what we may secretly guard against, does not happen.

In drawing all these strands together, I shall leave three final points with the House. First, it is the considered opinion of many people that, whatever we wish to do in this country, continental Europe will move towards a single currency. If this country were not involved in that process, it would be a disaster. We spent too long on the outside of the European Community to underestimate the effects of isolation. We have never truly caught up, and although our economic and industrial performance during the past decade shows many good points, there are enough flaws in our performance to make our isolation rather worrying. Without the discipline which adherence to external forces demands, I am not at all certain that the United Kingdom economy will bite the bullet sufficiently on its own to complete its restructuring to give us the sort of prosperous future for which we are all looking.

Secondly—the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) mentioned the United States—we must recall that the United States and other countries now regard us in relation to our position in Europe and how we feel about it. If we are not fully involved in Europe, their feeling for us will gradually diminish. Thirdly, once we have made the commitment to the future, paradoxically speed is far less important. There is a whole group of questions about monetary union which need to be carefully explored. Too rapid a timetable has many disadvantages, but the rapid timetable that is being pursued by others is nothing more than an attempt to get us involved. Once we make that commitment to a single currency by making it plain that we think that the hard ecu will lead to a single currency, the pressure of commitment will be off and we shall have more time to explore the issues that we need to explore.

8.51 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I intervene in this debate to try to correct any possible impression that there is a consensus across both sides of the House which is opposed to progress towards European monetary union. However, after the outstanding speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), I do not think that it is necessary to try to create that impression.

It is true that there is some sort of consensus extending to both sides of the House, but it extends primarily to those hon. Members who still believe that there is something rather splendid about isolation. Those hon. Members hold the view that we should not move towards economic and monetary union. However, there is a much broader consensus, although perhaps a little less vocal, to the effect that it is to the long-term benefit of this country to be fully involved in steady progress towards European economic and monetary union, even though there is room for plenty of debate as to how fast we go and what route we choose.

In some ways it seems rather quixotic to be arguing now for renewed progress towards a single European currency. It is part of the process of European integration, at a time when the public perception is that the European Community has shown itself to be pitifully inadequate and irrelevant to the gravest problem facing the world today. Furthermore, it is the perception that the first step towards monetary union has tied the Government's hands, just when the onset of recession seems to offer a siren call for maximum flexibility in exchange rate and interest rate policy.

On top of all that, further progress towards economic and monetary union ties us closer to the European Community at the moment when its trading policies,

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

especially in agricultural products, are damaging to world trade and have already brought an open conflict with the United States, at whose side, when the chips are down —as they are in the Gulf—we have to find our place. The arguments for hanging back from the process of European integration—monetary, economic and political—and for blocking progress if we can, have never looked more seductive. It is important to counter those arguments, and I shall try to do so briefly.

I do not like arguments ad hominem, but I feel bound to point out that those in this House, and still more those in the press, who are now telling us with such glee that Europe has let us down, and that we should turn our back on the EC and concentrate on our special relationship with the United States, are the very people who have been scornful of the European Community all along. Those people, particularly in the tabloid press, and very particularly in the *Daily Express*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Star*—whose mission in life it is to promote international misunderstanding—are busy spreading stories of, for example, French unreliability, despite the fact that France has committed substantial fighting forces in the Gulf, and has provided staunch, if occasionally idiosyncratic diplomatic support. I may be speaking for others besides myself when I say that it was the much-criticised final French attempt to find a compromise which finally convinced me that war with Saddam Hussein was inevitable and just.

Even if those criticisms were justified, however—and it hardly becomes us to criticise the Germans for not sending troops abroad when we imposed the condition that they should not do so—just what would we achieve if we went along with the argument that we can now let the European Community stew and concentrate instead on our bonds with the United States, and that as a first step we should resist any further advance towards European monetary union, try to block it if we can, and if we cannot, opt out of it to the extent that our commitment to the exchange rate mechanism permits us to do so?

That seems an incredibly dangerous line of argument to me. It is to ignore all the lessons of the past 30 years, and to be influenced solely by the lessons of the past 10 days. None of us can make even an intelligent guess as to what patterns of alliances and commitments are likely to survive the Gulf war but to assume that our ties and shared interests with the United States, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia are likely to prove more stable and more durable than our ties with France, Germany and Italy seems to me to be the very height of imprudence.

No—for all its horrors and its drama, the Gulf war is only indirectly relevant to Britain's long-term interests. However long the conflict, at the end of it Britain's destiny lies in Europe. If Europe has failed to show the unity of purpose which was so sorely needed, that is not a reason to opt out—we cannot opt out—but a reason to redouble our efforts to elicit that unity of purpose in the economic, monetary, and political fields.

Only the charismatic personality of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) could have persuaded anyone of the absurd proposition that a single European market could flourish for long without a single currency. The present Prime Minister is entirely right to argue that the way to achieve that single currency is not by diktat from Brussels, but by allowing free choice and market forces to bring it into being, as they assuredly will.

Nor will anyone be so foolish as to argue that a single currency is the easy way to get back to growth without inflation. We have, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) pointed out some time ago, made this part of our task far more difficult by joining the exchange rate mechanism four years too late, and probably at the wrong exchange rate. But we cannot make things easier in the short run or better in the long run by trying to skip out of this obligation now. We may have started in the wrong weather and along the wrong route, but we are halfway up the rock face now, and it is more dangerous to go down than to go up.

This debate is an opportunity to turn our attention from immediate matters of life and death to long-term issues of national survival. The coming months will undoubtedly forge strong links of blood and brotherhood with the United States of America, but we would be foolish to bank our whole future on the durability of those ties. Geographical and strategic factors, the pull of internal domestic internal politics, will eventually prevail over ties of gratitude and sheer sacrifice. Britain's future lies in Europe now as much as ever it did before the Gulf war. We must accept the implications of that fact and play our part in shaping the economic, monetary and political purposes of the Community to which we have no choice but to belong.

9.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I wish to deal with a couple of points. As one or two other hon. Members wish to take part in this debate, I shall be as brief as I can. I wish to refer to some of the remarks made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I think that one or two of his points were taken a little politically by some of my hon. Friends, and perhaps in his concluding remarks he will clarify his position further.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) said, there is a measure of agreement between both sides of the House and indeed between both Front Benches on one essential element. It is that a hastened, rushed or rapid movement towards a common European currency would be a disaster. Both Front Benches recognise this and would be bold enough to say that they are opposed to such a course. Their reasons and methods of doing so at present seem to diverge. I feel that the Opposition has missed a trick. If they really believe that, it seems to me that finding the way forward from that position might be to take another look at the very proposals which at the moment they are pooh-poohing. I refer to the proposals by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a parallel currency—the hard ecu.

I recognise that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has given his reasons for any form of delay and explained the impracticability of any European currency as the desire to get regional divergencies reversed and to have regional convergence. However, I think that he will admit—my hon. Friends have debunked this theory to some degree—that the costs of so doing in any practical sense in the next 10 years might be prohibitive and extremely unpopular with the electorate. Although

perhaps both sides of the House would like to see some of the movement that he anticipates happening, as I am sure would be the view of us all, in the next 15 to 20 years as an ideal solution, the idea that this can be done within the next five or six years, as our partners in Europe might envisage, would be out of the question in fiscal terms.

Therefore, to what step does one look next? One looks at the idea that we want to evolve rather than to have things imposed upon us. I do not think that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East disagrees with that. I think that, secretly, that is probably the way he would most practically see things move as well. It is evolution. It is not simply a matter of market forces or perhaps his repugnance or his party's repugnance in respect of market forces. It is the question of evolution rather than instant compulsion. An enormous range of topics within Europe can be adopted by this evolutionary process—l'accord de petits pas that has already been referred to.

A British approach—I appeal to the Opposition to give this matter some thought—with some degree of bipartisan commitment towards that sort of principle, even if there were different interpretations of it, would greatly enhance the appeal that we might find among other countries in Europe. That would probably find an echo in Germany, Italy and Spain, not just among the Christian Democrats but among the Social Democrat and Socialist parties. I appeal to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East in his reply to touch on whether I have not at least found some measure of accord between both sides of the House.

One area about which I am particularly concerned is the question of the practicability of monetary union in a political sense. I used to be an international banker and still have connections in that direction. I was telephoned in the latter part of last year by three or four incensed French international bankers, including one very senior official from the Banque de France, because the previous day that bank had lowered its interest rates by half a per cent. The following day—without consultation; without even a telephone call—the Bundesbank raised its interest rate by 1 per cent. That caused extreme embarrassment to the Banque de France, which, the day after that, had to raise its own rate by 1·5 per cent.

That illustrates my fears about the workings of the hurried economic union envisaged by Delors. In practice, the Bundesbank would call the tune and everyone else would jump to it. I do not believe that the Opposition wish to pursue such a course, and I know that Conservative Members do not. Moreover, I do not think that it would be in the interests of the rest of Europe, including Germany and the Bundesbank itself. We need a step-by-step approach.

In that context, I commend the proposals for a European monetary fund advanced most recently by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The EMF that he envisages contains some of the better features of the IMF, and certainly has the fiscal potential to assist member countries with weaker economies. In that regard, it could be enormously valuable. Those on the Opposition Front Benchers should take a second look at that proposal, which I do not consider antipathetic to their wish to maintain some political accountability while also achieving certain ends.

I agree with what has been said by my hon. Friends the Members for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Favell), for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and for Bury, North (Mr. Burt): we are discussing two separate issues, economic union and monetary union. We can all strive towards the achievement of economic union through the opening up of the single market; monetary union, however, has political implications, unless a mechanism is introduced to dilute the political aspect and make it more fiscal.

An alternative exchange rate—ultimately, a freely convertible exchange rate—offers that opportunity. Admittedly, as more and more people use it—especially in the commercial world—it could eventually lead to the introduction of a single or common currency; it would, however, exist as a common currency for some time before it became a single currency, and that would allow a sufficient period for the evolution of political structure and accountability to take effect. I am therefore less worried about that aspect of monetary union than are some of my colleagues.

What hon. Members on both sides of the House must recognise is that, whatever path we choose, the removal of exchange rates as an effective economic tool is not just going to happen; it is here already. We are already finding that, within the EMS structure, our ability to use exchange rates has been reduced. There is no doubt that both the French and the British Government are now in a position to lower interest rates: inflation is on its way down, and all the recessionary indicators suggest that that time is approaching, if not already here.

We cannot do so, however, because the Germans fear that the significant amount of capital needed to rebuild the east German economy will push up German inflation. They are therefore raising or firming their own interest rates and subsequently their exchange rates. That means that we, in turn, are unable to move. The patient has taken the medicine but its recovery, both here and in France, is threatened—in this case by another member state, Germany.

That is the discipline that the EMS has already placed upon us. That is why we must recognise that the removal of significant exchange rate divergence as a monetary tool is already here. Likewise, the removal even of significant moves in exchange rates is already here. It is no longer a tool that we can use at our own discretion. Therefore, it does not pose a significant threat in the future. It is something that we could live with if the system and the structure were allowed to evolve along the lines proposed by my right hon. Friend. Therefore, I commend those measures to the House.

9.12 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): There are increasing attractions for businesses and travellers in having a currency which can be used without transaction costs, and, in the case of business, without hedging, throughout the European Community. However, it is apparent from this debate that the time scale within which this could be achieved and the means by which it could be achieved are still very unclear. I very much hope that the present negotiations will lead to an agreement which can be reconciled with the aspirations of all 12 countries concerned.

I believe that there are elements in the hard ecu proposals which could contribute to such an agreement, and I believe it is an advantage of those proposals that they

[Mr. Patrick Ground]

could be the most practical way for the Community as a whole to move towards monetary union. I see two principal advantages in the proposals.

First, I see advantages in allowing producers and customers to determine the pace of advance towards monetary union. Travellers and people who are selling goods and services to the Community could decide to take ecus instead of existing Community currencies. Although the hard ecu would not be legal tender, nevertheless it could be accepted in hotels and shops just as the dollar is accepted in certain Latin American countries and the deutschmark is accepted in Luxembourg. For business, it could be a matter of agreement to use the ecu rather than any other Community currency.

Secondly, I see advantage in that the hard ecu provides a mechanism for testing the system of administration of the proposed single currency before it is fully implemented. It is obvious from the drafts, from both the European monetary union and the central bank, that there are areas where considerably greater thought and experience are required before we can be confident that the proposals will work and will commend themselves to the people of 12 countries.

I was amazed when I heard the speech of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), because I did not realise that there were such experienced and continuing apologists for the role of devaluation and inflation. When I heard him speak, I understood why the two Labour Governments since the second world war that inherited fixed exchange rates both had to devalue the pound. However, I find it astonishing that the disadvantages of those policies should not have come home to the right hon. Member and that he had not noticed that our most successful competitors in the world have ignored this route and followed a completely different path of avoiding devaluation and successfully competing in their exports.

Since 1979, the country has been embarked on a different course. It would be a mistake, either in the House or in the Community, to underestimate the significance of that change of course or the determination to continue with anti-inflationary policies. Although the present rate of inflation is unacceptably high, the average rate of inflation since 1979 is only one half of what it was during the period of office of the Labour Government of 1974-79. In relative terms, the pound has held its value compared with most continental currencies.

It is true that the deutschmark has appreciated against sterling, as it has appreciated against other currencies, but the value of the pound against the dollar is similar to what it was immediately after the 1979 election. The pound had appreciated against the franc, against the Italian lira and against the Spanish peseta. In relative terms, sterling has held its value better in the past 11 years.

After the experiences of the 1970s, many more people now see the advantages of lower inflation. It is significant that, in the past three general elections, the party with the less inflationary policies has been successful. People at work increasingly recognise the advantages of being paid in a currency that holds its value. Pensioners recognise that it is better for their pensions and savings to be in a currency that holds its value.

Joining the exchange rate mechanism and taking part in the negotiations on monetary union are part of the anti-inflationary course on which this country has been embarked since 1979. I reject the advocacy of devaluation which has been practised by some in the House tonight and outside the House in certain quarters. There is a good prospect of succeeding in holding sterling within the currency band that we have chosen. I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends that devaluation is not the answer. It is important that it is realised in this country and in the rest of the Community that there is considerable determination here to make a success of the course on which we have embarked by entering the ERM and by entering the negotiations in which the Government are currently involved.

9.17 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I will take only two minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to say why I am opposed to a single currency and why, regrettably, I too am opposed to the hard ecu plan. The single currency will inexorably lead to political union. That view is held by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) and by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and by many other right hon. and hon. Members of all parties. I will not quote them now; I will save their comments for a rainy day. I shall especially save the excellent speech that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made in November. It is engraved on my heart, and I shall produce it on a suitable day, but not now.

I oppose the hard ecu plan for two reasons. Either the other 11 members of the Community, which have already said that they are in favour of a single currency and a single bank, will reject it out of hand because it will not lead to a stable currency, in which case we are back where we started arguing about what we should do about a single currency, or, alternatively, they will accept it. If they do, it will be for one reason—because they believe that it will lead to a single currency. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already said that he believes that it may well do so at some time or other. It will lead there even more quickly then Mr. Delors intends because the Commission will ensure that it does. Mr. Delors and all the federalists, both here and on the continent, realise that a single currency is the way to political union.

I believe that the single currency is a Trojan horse to a united states of Europe, and I believe that the hard ecu plan could well be the wheels on which that Trojan horse takes us there.

9.21 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): One of the common themes running through much of our debate today has been the need to recognise that we live in an increasingly interdependent world. As economic activity becomes more transnational in character, we have to establish ways of working more closely together and co-ordinating our economic decision-making. This will become even more essential after the onset of the single market at the start of 1993.

In this debate a number of my hon. Friends, especially perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), have recognised this inevitable truth. It has

perhaps not been accepted in its totality by one or two others of my hon. Friends, who have expressed their views with their usual robust vigour.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who has indicated to me that he has to be in his constituency this evening, spoke, for example, of Britain's entry into the exchange rate mechanism and said that it would have inevitable deflationary consequences. That is indeed the case unless —it is a very important "unless"—we improve our economic performance, because the iron logic of membership of the exchange rate mechanism is that there are only three options open to us—to create unemployment, to reduce real wages. or to improve our industrial productivity and performance.

It is because of that iron logic that it becomes even more important for us to adopt the approach to supply side improvement for which Opposition Members have been arguing for months. The crucial need for that improvement was recognised and put very clearly indeed in the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Mr. Spearing: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, poor substitute though I may be for my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

Of course, everyone in the House recognises that greater international co-operation in many endeavours, including those in the financial field, with techniques and trade increasing, is absolutely essential. The point that my right hon. Friend raised is this. If, through the activities of the Government, our industrial potential does not make the inevitable requirement of improved industrial performance possible, does not advocacy of the ERM consign us inevitably to the other two options?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend rightly identifies a failure in policy on the part of the Government. That failure would be fatal for our domestic economy whether or not we were in the exchange rate mechanism, but it would be especially fatal to us now that we are in the mechanism.

It is clear to us that closer co-operation within the European Community on monetary and economic policy is both inevitable and desirable. The key questions are how that process occurs, who makes the decisions and what the end product is. The Government's response to those issues and crucial questions has been deeply inadequate. The style, of course, has changed in recent weeks—the tone is more communicative—but the substance remains entirely the same as it was when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was in charge. The only proposal currently on the table from the British Government—it formed the bulk of the Chancellor's opening speech—is the hard ecu plan. If anything, the Government's latest working up of the hard ecu idea in the proposed treaty amendments for the intergovernmental conference is an even less attractive proposal than was the initial suggestion that Sir Michael Butler first drew up.

There are three principal problems with the hard ecu. First, it remains unclear whether the entire exercise is designed to provide a transition to a single currency, or to prevent such an occurrence by offering an alternative. The Government are, I fear, still entirely ambiguous on the subject. The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) insistently asked about the objective of our policy. He might perhaps have been better occupied in addressing precisely the same question to his own Front Bench.

We have, of course, had conflicting information from the Government. On 9 October, the Financial Secretary told the House of Lords Select Committee that there could be a faster route to a single currency even than the Delors programme. The former Prime Minister told us on 30 October that it would not become a single currency, because no one would take up the idea. The current document that the Government have tabled in the past couple of weeks says nothing at all about a single currency. It says an awful lot about the European monetary fund, but it does not tell us whether the Government intend the use of the hard ecu to move in the direction of a single currency.

We are left wondering. Is the hard ecu simply a device to cover up the Government's embarrassment, is it a minor tightening up of the current basket ecu—a point taken up by Karl Otto Pöhl in his speech to the London School of Economics—or is it a way of proceeding to full economic and monetary union? I suspect that the answer is that it is actually all those options at the same time. The Government wish to keep all those options in play so as to keep the disparate forces behind them in line. The Chancellor, I fear, cannot go on riding three horses at once forever.

Secondly, the Government give great detail in their document about the proposed structure for the new European monetary fund. There are, however, alarming indications in the document "Economic and Monetary Union—Beyond Stage One", about the powers and degree of accountability that they envisage for the European monetary fund. In article V, the Government propose—their ambiguity extends not only to the whole purpose of the hard ecu scheme but to the nature of the European monetary fund—two alternative mechanisms.

The first of those mechanisms is a totally independent EMF. The Government pick up the wording of the Commission document and of the Herman report in the European Parliament. They say quite clearly:

"the Governing Board and Executive Board of the European Monetary Fund shall be completely independent and shall neither seek nor take instructions from any Community institution, national government or any other body or person."

That is put forward by our Government as a viable option within the document that they are tabling at the IGC. If we link with that option the proposals in articles VI and IX of the document, we see that it is the independent rather than the accountable route that the Government are seeking to follow.

The European monetary fund proposed by the Government would be made up entirely of central bank representatives, the Government propose yielding up democratic control to a committee of unelected bankers. That would be entirely unacceptable to the Opposition.

Thirdly, the Government fail to appreciate the inevitable, if haphazard, effect of adopting a common, readily available, undevaluable currency in exact parallel with a weaker domestic currency. In such circumstances, there would be an inevitable drift from the domestic currency to the hard ecu.

Whatever the Chancellor may say about the Government's intentions, over time the common currency would inevitably become a single currency. We would

[Mr. Smith]

discover that we had arrived at a single currency without any real planning or forethought about the process. The only way of stopping that would be for the Government to place limits on the use of the hard ecu alternative currency within our domestic economy, but the Government specifically ruled that option out in a parliamentary answer to me some months ago.

This afternoon the Prime Minister made much of the market-driven nature of the hard ecu proposal. To the Opposition, that is precisely the problem. The Government's proposal yokes together an unaccountable central bank and an entirely market-led approach to the use of the currency provided. That is the worst of both possible worlds. The timetable and the ground rules will be determined by the players in the marketplace rather than by democratically elected representatives of the people. We do not wish to see that happen.

As the inevitable progress to a single currency takes place, there will be a further problem. It will begin to cause sharper disparities between those whom I would call the insiders of the system and the outsiders. The hard ecu scheme has an unsuccessful precedent. On 1 July 1920, the franc was introduced into the Saarland as a second currency of legal tender with the aim of offsetting the then plummeting reichsmark. Unfortunately, the extra currency did nothing to stabilise the markets, despite the existence of an integrated market in the Saarland between both Germany and France. It impoverished the retail sector and small industries and allowed a safety net only for those with substantial savings.

In exactly the same way, those who would gain most from a hard ecu, especially in the early days, would be people with a day-to-day knowledge of the financial market and people with large resources, often at the expense of those with limited knowledge or limited ability to capitalise on the marketplace. A market-determined system will inevitably lead to such consequences. The Opposition seek a democratically determined system, no arbitrary timetables, no side-show stuff—that is exactly what the hard ecu is—and no selling of the pass at the outset.

It is as irresponsible to accept economic and monetary union, a single currency and a central bank at any price and in any shape—as I fear the Liberal Democrats sometimes appear to do—as it is to rule the option out completely. We want a recognition that a process of integration is under way and under discussion. We want Britain to play a full and constructive part in that process. We want a determination to see that process shaped according to the principles and conditions that will most benefit the British economy and people.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has, at some length, gone into what we should not be doing. Will he now tell us what we should be doing?

Mr. Smith: The Financial Secretary anticipates the next five or six minutes of my speech. I am grateful to him for spotting exactly the point at which my speech ceases to be a sharp and cogent criticism of the Government's proposals and becomes an outline of the Opposition's proposals.

Our proposals are fully in accord with the views of all —I stress all—our democratic socialist partners in the European Community countries. The following are the principles that we bring to the approach to economic and monetary union. The first is an understanding that we must not consider monetary policy and monetary instruments in isolation from the overall approach to the economy of Europe. That is why we place such emphasis on the potential role of ECOFIN, making it a permanent forum for all the Governments of the Community, including our own, to play a part in determining, democratically, the overall aims and objectives of any monetary institutions. The Government touch on that possibility in article IX of their document, but in a minimalist fashion.

Secondly, there must be democratic accountability for any central bank, not in its hour-by-hour operation, but in the general direction of its policy.

Thirdly, there is a need for a strengthened regional policy. Much has been made of that point by a number of hon. Members in this debate, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). It is important to distinguish between two hostile arguments.

Some people argue against the very principle of regional policy. The Government, in particular, tend to take that line. Their somewhat dated document, "An Evolutionary Approach to Economic and Monetary Union", brought us the 12 regional currencies idea. That lasted about two and a half months. It sets out clearly the Government's opposition to the idea of regional policy as the principal mechanism—once the use of the interest rate and exchange rate mechanisms has been ruled out—for addressing imbalances within any integrated European economy. We believe that we need regional policy to begin to address those imbalances—and, of course, to iron them out completely. We need to see those imbalances in a domestic context as well as a European context.

Others argue that regional policy may be right in principle, but that such enormous amounts of money would be required to have an impact that it would become impractical. It is true that, over time, large sums of money would need to be provided. But we should argue—and the Opposition have consistently argued—that there should be a shift within the existing European Community budget, from agricultural support to regional and structural support. In the long term, that is the key to unlocking the funds that may be needed.

Some people have argued that Britain would be a net contributor. I do not believe that that would be the case, but those hon. Members who make that argument miss the crucial point—we are talking about region-to-region transfers, not just nation-to-nation transfers. Do those hon. Members believe that in Wales, Scotland, the north, the north-west and inner London there are not needs to be met and poverty to be addressed? Some of the things that they have been saying today suggest that they do not believe that those problems require tackling.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way, as I have only a couple of minutes left.

Fourthly, there is a need for a degree of economic convergence before currencies can be irrevocably locked together. In 1979, we had broad economic convergence on

a host of indicators. Our economic performance was, broadly speaking, at the European average. It is a measure of the Government's economic incompetence that during the 1980s——

Mr. Maples: On inflation.

Mr. Smith: I should point out to the Economic Secretary that I am right about inflation. In 1979, when the Government came to power, Britain had an inflation rate at the European average. It is now more than twice the European average. It is a measure of the Government's economic incompetence that, during the 1980s—the decade of unparalleled opportunity arising from North sea oil—they have plunged our standing and our performance from the European average to the bottom of the European league.

Our current position—I remind the Economic Secretary of this, as he seems to need reminding—is one of falling output, falling productivity, falling industrial investment and business confidence, and steeply rising unemployment. Our economy has been gravely weakened and it will take us time to catch up. It will take a Labour Government to begin that process and to secure the best place for the people of Britain in the Europe of the future.

9.40 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): This is the second time that I have had the pleasure of making the winding-up speech in a debate on economic and monetary union. The first time was in November 1989, when I was a Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Since then, these matters have been gathered fully into the hands of the Treasury, and I have been gathered with them.

It is genuinely a privilege to make this speech because these matters affect the House of Commons profoundly. They go to the heart of what it does and has done for many hundreds of years. These debates bring out the best in the House of Commons. This has not been a partisan debate. Differences have been passionately and strongly argued, but divisions have not run on party lines. Because these matters are important for the House of Commons, we take seriously this opportunity to hear the views of the House and to understand the mind of the House.

We have heard some immensely distinguished speeches. Although I do not have the time to mention them all, two made a great impression on me—those of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Myer). The right hon. Gentleman spoke with great eloquence and magnificent savagery about the stance of his party.

Mr. Chris Smith: And about the hon. Gentleman's party.

Mr. Maude: No, the right hon. Gentleman was rather complimentary about the Government's position. I recollect that he expressed the wish that his party might speak on this subject with the clarity with which we spoke.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West speaks from a standpoint on Europe with which we are all familiar. He spoke quite passionately and eloquently, but he also spoke candidly about the shortcomings that the European Community has displayed. It is not being negative or anti-European to refer to these shortcomings, as he would be the first to recognise.

That illustrates an important point for the debate. It is not about being pro or anti-European. It is about what steps the European Community should take to improve and advance itself. Should it take sensible steps that will benefit all member states and all within each member state, or will it take wrong steps that will cause the European Community to falter?

We believe it to be of profound importance that the Community should take the right steps in a measured and sensible way, having fully appraised all the possible and probable consequences. Of course, the forum in which these matters will be decided is the intergovernmental conference, which has started and will continue next Monday.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney expressed concern about a Commission paper that sets out some draft treaty changes. It is important to stress that that is a Commission paper, whereas the conference is intergovernmental. These are not matters that will be decided by the Commission. Certainly the Commission does not have an exclusive right of proposal to the intergovernmental conference. Indeed, it has no right of proposal at all, save with the consent of the conference. I can assure the House that the Governments taking part in this conference are jealous of their right to take these decisions—and rightly so.

Most of us are familiar with the remarks made by M. Delors after the Rome meeting of the European Council. He talked about whether it might be necessary to provoke a political crisis if things were not to go quite as he hoped they would. I can assure the House that it does not lie within his power to provoke a political crisis. These are matters that will be decided between Governments and by Governments. I can assure the House also that the British Government will take a very full part in those discussions —a part that I believe will be of central influence and central importance.

We have debated two broad questions today. To some extent, they are separate. The first relates to what we believe should be the Community's next step in the economic and monetary field. The second relates to the attitude that we should take to the goal of a single currency and a single monetary policy—the goal of full currency union. On the first question, we believe that attention is increasingly focusing on the next steps and that the debate is increasingly practical and pragmatic. As to the second question, we have set out very clearly our suggestions and proposals for the creation of a non-inflationary common currency, with a new European monetary institution to administer it.

Hon. Members raised a number of points about those proposals—points about how they would work and about how attractive their effect might be. However, there has been very little broad dissent from the notion that this is a sensible set of steps to take. It is sensible that, at the next stage, we should have a common currency with a monetary institution to manage it. That will enable all 12 member states to go forward together with arrangements that will benefit everyone. It will accommodate the aspirations of all member states and will meet the concerns that are expressed in this House. Clearly, it is gaining a good deal

[Mr. Maude]

of support. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in his opening speech, set out some of the support that it is gradually gathering.

The Leader of the Opposition, after a fleeting visit to Madrid in the middle of December, announced to the world that the British hard ecu proposal was dead—"stone dead" is the expression that I think he used. Such is his customary sureness of touch that that pronouncement in itself was enough to stimulate around the Community several expressions of support for the proposal.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was, wisely, rather more circumspect in his remarks about our proposal. I can assure him that the proposal and the idea of a common currency as the next step for the Community are gathering increasing support. He rather misrepresented the proposal's effect, as did his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He suggested that it might lead to a single currency imposed in some way by the market, that there could be such a massive substitution of national currencies through the hard ecu that we could suddenly arrive at a single currency with no further decision taken by Governments or parliaments.

I can assure him that that would not happen, because there could not be a single currency without national parliaments taking a decision at a later stage to abandon their national currency. The hard ecu could not suddenly act as the British single currency without the House of Commons having made a considered decision to abandon the pound sterling. I am happy to be able to reassure the right hon. and learned Gentleman on that point.

Mr. Spearing: But is that not taking account of the difference between currency and legal tender? If both currencies become legal tender and a preference emerged for one—my hon. Friend says the hard ecu—although the pound sterling might be legal tender, practice might mean that it disappeared. It would exist only de jure, and a de jure cancellation of it would be necessary but not a matter of practical moment.

Mr. Maude: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman. The matter of legal tender is of slight importance. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) is something of an expert on the matter, and he made it clear that, for a currency to be used, it does not have to be legal tender. He made the point vividly by saying that Scottish bank notes are not legal tender in this country but that they can be and frequently are used here, even within this building, or particularly within this building. With two Scottish Members on the Opposition Front Bench, the number of Scottish bank notes circulating in the building might increase. It is certainly not essential for a currency to be a legal tender. It is of comparatively slight importance whether a currency is legal tender or not.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) wondered whether there would be advantages in this currency for borrowers. I believe that there would be substantial advantages. This would be a currency with a good store of value for both borrowers and investors. It would not be able to devalue against the other strongest currency in the EC and thus investments made in that currency would hold their value well. Investors like to be sure that the currency that they are borrowing will retain its value.

I believe, and all the evidence suggests, that the currency would be attractive. We believe that its first use would be in the area of investments. It would be used by businesses operating across frontiers in the Community to reduce their transaction costs in a way that is said to be one of the great advantages of a single currency. One would be able to harvest many of the purported advantages of a single currency by creating this common currency. It would be used increasingly by those who travel across frontiers in Europe. In that way, it would increasingly be used and it would be an attractive development for the Community and for our citizens in the Community.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North also wondered what protection there would be for the European monetary fund should one of the national currencies which the fund was holding in its reserves depreciate radically. First, if the European monetary fund found itself holding excessive amounts of a national currency, the repurchase obligation would come into effect. The obligation of the national monetary authority to repurchase its national currency using the hard ecu or another EC currency would be operated, so that itself would be a discipline. But should there be a realignment which causes the value to depreciate, a possibility is set out in our proposals.

Paragraph 6 of article VI—which is in square brackets because it is a possibility at this stage—provides an obligation that national monetary authorities should guarantee the value of their national currencies held by the fund.

I hope that that deals with most of the issues raised on the hard ecu proposal. Again, I assure the House that the idea of a common currency is discussed increasingly and is increasingly attractive to those who have the real interests of the European Community at heart.

The second question is what the attitude should be to the move to a single currency. Most of the debate has rightly been on that issue, because it is of huge importance to the House. It provoked many passionate and eloquent speeches, such as that by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney which I have already mentioned. Most hon. Members know their minds on the subject and know where they stand on whether there should be a commitment now to a move to a single currency. Two of the few equivocal speeches on the subject were those of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and his colleague, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. They were profoundly equivocal.

The matter is of economic and constitutional importance. It is important economically because of the devastating impact upon the economy of member states if it were done prematurely before the economies of the European Community had converged sufficiently and were prepared to accept the huge stresses that the introduction of a single currency would bring.

It would be premature to move to a single currency before proper economic convergence had been achieved. I am not talking necessarily about a convergence of levels of income but certainly about a convergence on inflation performance, interest rates and budget deficits or surpluses. On all those matters, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in the opening speech, there is massive

divergence. On any view, it would be many years before there was enough convergence for a single currency to be introduced without the gravest economic dislocation.

For some, economic dislocation would provide perhaps the opportunity or the excuse for a programme of massive resource transfers. It became increasingly clear that that was the let-out for the Labour party, which believes that, because everyone else thinks that we ought to do this, we should agree to do it as well, leaving the problems to be sorted out later. Opposition Members seem to think that a fairy godmother will appear in the Community and unleash vast amounts of money which will flow around the Community to ease the discomfort and dislocation. I have to tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that there is no fairy godmother.

If there were to be a massive increase of the sort that would be needed in the structural funds, a good part of that money would come from this country, from British taxpayers; it would leave the shores of Britain and would go elsewhere. The elegant idea propounded by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that it would not be a nation-to-nation transfer but a region-to-region transfer does not solve anything. It would still be British taxpayers providing money, which would leave Britain to go to other member states. These are powerful arguments for not committing ourselves to move to a single currency, and I can assure the House that we shall not ask the House to do that.

The constitutional arguments are also important. The idea of parliamentary sovereignty is something derided. It is sometimes thought to be of slight importance. Sometimes it is argued, as it has been tonight, that there is already little autonomy, so why should we bother? It is also sometimes argued that other member states do not bother much about this, so why should we? I think that it does matter. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in the United Kingdom must account regularly to the House of Commons for his conduct of monetary policy; this has been the position for several centuries. It is not always comfortable or convenient for Chancellors, but it is rather important for the authority of the House that it should happen. It does not happen in other member states of the European Community.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

MOD Quality Assurance Unit

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

10 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): This is an extremely difficult time for the Ministry of Defence and I do not want to add unduly to its burdens at the moment, but I believe that the present crisis in the Gulf and the distractions of Ministers and senior civil servants may be being used as an opportunity to thwart Government policy on the dispersal of civil servants to the regions. This issue is bigger than simply that of whether this unit should be moved; it concerns the trust that the people put in the Government's word, and it is an issue of management because tonight I want to ask the Minister whether he will allow this trickery to frustrate his predecessor's policy. We have a right to know who is in charge of the Ministry of Defence, Sir Humphrey or the Secretary of State.

Let me briefly set out the facts of the matter as I see them and so that everyone else can see what is going on. The Government's policy on relocation is set out in the written reply by the Paymaster General, then my right hon. Friend the Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) on 9 February 1989 at column 751.

In pursuit of this policy, first announced in 1979, with my hon. Friends the hon. Members for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt)—whom I see here this evening—for Hexham (Mr. Amos), and for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter)—who has sent his apologies—I went to see the Secretary of State for Defence in late 1988 to secure the movement of the Department's quality assurance unit from cramped and inadequate premises on three sites in Woolwich and Bromley in south London. A bid was prepared by the newly formed Teesside development corporation on the basis of one of its five flagship development sites in Teesside, the Preston Farm industrial estate. As usual, the development corporation carried out an excellent job in presenting the manifold advantages of such a move from Woolwich and Bromley to the north of England.

The project was costed at £72 million, and the TDC obtained two tenders from established and reputable civil contractors in that amount. In anticipation of the sale of the Bromley and Woolwich premises, which in part could already achieve about £50 million, it was expected that the relocation could be largely self-financing. An unusual finance package had then to be put together for the Ministry of Defence to bridge the development of the new site and the disposal of the old sites.

When the Treasury would not give immediate consent, my colleagues and I approached the then Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), to ask for her support. This was readily forthcoming, and on 4 July 1989 final approval of the project, now costed at £120 million, was given by the then Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury).

In September 1989, the present Secretary of State took over, and I invited my right hon. Friend to visit the constituency and to turn the first sod on the development. It was anticipated then that, once the redeployment was completed, savings in revenue costs of the order of £9

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

million a year would accrue to the Department. The development corporation immediately began development of the site and negotiations were started to move three explosive testing units to the same site, so that all Ministry of Defence quality assurance could be centralised in one place.

Those further moves were announced on 25 January 1990, once again in a written answer to me. Work continued apace until 10 August last year when, only seven months after its announcement, the enlarged project was stopped by a letter from Mr. Miller, the director general of quality assurance. In that letter Mr. Miller said that his department had received the first estimate from the consulting engineers, Atkins, of the cost of the detailed design of the buildings and that these were

"very considerably higher than PSA's figures adjusted for addition of the outstations and inflation . . . This has forced us into a cost-cutting exercise . . . and a reexamination of whether it makes sense . . . to replicate on Teesside all our existing facilities."

Later in the letter he said that major contracts associated with the move should be deferred until a re-examination of the costs had been completed.

In my view, and that of all my hon. Friends, the Department would be quite right to hold up this project if, as I am told, the costs have soared from £120 million to between £250 million and £280 million. However, it has become apparent that the Atkins costing is fundamentally flawed, and the Ministry of Defence knows it. The structure and layout of this facility in the plans would make it the most expensive construction ever built on Teesside. Per square foot, it would be nine times as expensive as premium office space under construction on the neighbouring plot.

Atkins is a firm of consulting engineers, not property specialists, and that might, in part, explain what is going on. However, let the House not imagine that this is some complicated venture. We are talking about offices, laboratories and warehouse space of a type commonly constructed on Teesside. The rocketing cost appears also to stem from a specification which can only be described as grandiose. The laboratories are larger than those used in the nuclear industry. That is why the chief executive of the Teesside development corporation has been attempting to get a copy of the specification and the costing from Mr. Miller, safe in the knowledge that Teesside can produce a much more reasonable quotation on a sensible specification.

I put that point to the Secretary of State and the Minister when I saw them formally with my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) last year, but I am sorry to say that we have not yet received those documents. As a result, the cost of this project has mysteriously dropped by £100 million. So officials have now fallen back upon a second tack—"We can't make a decision because of 'Options for Change', the defence White Paper." They even convinced the Secretary of State that the future of the quality assurance unit might be up for grabs, or in question.

On 4 December 1990, I said in the House that the only acceptable way that this redeployment could be cancelled would be if the whole unit were to be closed down by defence cuts. The chief executive and I have been reassured more than 20 times that the fundamental integrity of this project was not in jeopardy. That is why I have urged concerned local councillors not to panic. However, in spite of my many efforts to get those reassurances in writing, they have not been forthcoming.

I did not have any reason to doubt the bona fides of the Ministry of Defence officials until recently, when the full extent of their double dealing came to light. I now understand why the reply to my request for the specifications from the Secretary of State was as follows:

"The issues being considered are wider in scope than the affordability of the DGDQA as planned."

This was because, early in the new year, suspicions were aroused that the director general was examining a move to Portland, in Dorset. That was confirmed when my colleague who represents that part of the world—the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce)—started asking me questions about Stockton's interest in the matter while we were on a delegation visiting Israel.

Therefore, it is not the case that the quality assurance unit is about to be closed down completely. The price tag that the Government have put on the project is £140 million. Portland, which would be a patch-and-build operation, works out at £135 million—surprise, surprise. Teesside works out at £180 million on the specification which they will not disclose. This is absolutely disgraceful. Unless the Minister gets to grips with his Department, he will be forced to resile on a firm commitment made to the people of Teesside to move 1,500 jobs to the area. The Secretary of State will be forced to welsh on the promise given by his predecessor and endorsed by the former Prime Minister, and the faith which the people have put in the Conservative Government to deliver their promises will be undermined.

I see from articles in the press that there is speculation that the Government are to dispense with Portland as a naval base. That appears to be confirmed by what is going on in this case. While my heartfelt sympathies go out to the loyal citizens of that town for their long service to the Navy, it is in no way fair to break faith with the people of Teesside in order to soften the blow in Portland. The Ministry of Defence should therefore find the solution to that problem in the many other unannounced redeployments which it is considering.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The people of Teesside deserve better from the Government than they have had over this issue. As my hon. Friend knows, this is not the first time that major Government Departments have decided to move to that part of the world and have failed to do so. Every time we ask questions, we are given the trite answer that four fifths of all civil servants live outside London. If one takes all the people who work in the Department of Health and Social Security offices, job centres and everywhere else, that is bound to be the case. But no senior civil servants live outside London. It is because none of them will move to the north of England that we who represent Teesside suspect that what my hon. Friend is saying this evening is absolutely correct.

Mr. Devlin: There was one project 10 years ago when the previous Labour Government promised to move the Property Services Agency to Middlesbrough. The incoming Conservative Government cancelled it, because they wanted to privatise the PSA. That has not been forgotten. But it is different in this case, because the same

Government who promised it are now seeking to withdraw it. In the previous case, one Government promised it and another Government then cancelled that commitment.

Perhaps we should wait to see the outcome of the present war before we reshape the nation's defence capability. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement who I know to be a good friend to the north, should not on any account give in to a bunch of southern backsliders. Before my hon. Friend the Minister goes any further down this disagreeable route, I point to six reasons why he should now reaffirm the commitment which the Government made to the people of Teesside, and ask him to confirm two things.

First, such a development would have a major effect on the local economy, and particularly the training of good scientific skills. Indeed, youngsters from Teesside are already training in London for their new jobs once the move takes place. Secondly, the unemployment rate in Stockton is 10·7 per cent., down in the past two years from 18 per cent., whereas in Portland it is only 6 per cent., and until recently has been 4 per cent. Thirdly, this unit would benefit greatly from good access and infrastructure links. These are available on Teesside and are being further developed to take this development, whereas they are not available at alternative sites.

Fourthly, on Ministry of Defence costing criteria, whether one looks at a 20 or 50-year payback period, a patch-and-build scheme will need further expenditure sooner than a complete new build. Fifthly, the project as announced fitted in with the Government's policy of dispersal and played a role in the inner cities initiative, going as it was to an assisted area, in particular, it was a key site for the Teesside urban development corporation.

Lastly, and in my view most importantly, we should regard our word as our bond. Eleven years ago, the incoming Conservative Government cancelled the move of the PSA to Teesside so that they could privatise it. The same Government have now made the announcement that this dispersal is to take place and are now seeking to resile from it.

I ask the Minister three questions. First, will he confirm that the benefits that first attracted the Ministry of Defence to the scheme still stand? Secondly, will he give me an assurance that the original site has not been discounted? Thirdly, will he agree that the specification and costing should be given to the Teesside urban development corporation so that it can be re-examined and further representations made to him about the project? I say in conclusion that it will be to the eternal shame of this Government if this redeployment is allowed to fail.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on securing this Adjournment debate. He has represented his constituency's interests both in the House and outside it—not least when he and my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and myself last December. My hon. Friend has pursued the matter with the utmost tenacity and determination, and I respect his anxiety to secure jobs for his constituents and others in the north-east. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) is also present: I know that he too is very concerned about the problem, and has supported the project.

I must, however, reject the assertion by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South that the civil service has been involved in double dealing. The civil service is trying to make the best possible decision for the public, in the most thorough possible way. I am the Minister responsible; I am here to make the decision. If anyone is to be blamed, it is me. I assure my hon. Friend that I have the interests of his constituency at heart, but it is essential to the pursuit of good government to make the right decisions and the best possible use of public funds.

Let me briefly give the background to the proposal to relocate the directorate general defence quality assurance to Teeside, and explain what has led to the current review of that proposal and how matters now stand. As the House may recall, in the mid-1980s many organisational changes took place in the Ministry of Defence, with the twin aims of improving efficiency and reducing administrative overheads.

One of those changes was the establishment, in 1984, of the post of director general defence quality assurance. The DGDQA assumed responsibility for quality assurance matters across the Ministry of Defence, absorbing a number of separate departments. One of the DGDQA's responsibilities is to run laboratories and test facilities to provide technical support to the procurement executive and the armed services. The technical support directorate has approximately 1,100 staff of whom some 700 are scientific and technical officers. It handles some 40,000 tasks a year, including product verification, defect investigation, calibration, technical advice to project managers, advice on health and safety, environmental chemistry and some research and development. When my hon. Friend criticises the expense involved in any new building for the establishment, he should recognise the wide variety of work that the people there are called on to do.

Mr. Holt: Does that catalogue of jobs contain any element that was not known about before the Government's first commitment, or has some new requirement suddenly emerged? The employees have been doing this work for more than 50 years.

Mr. Carlisle: I shall explain later why the cost has risen; I think that that is what my hon. Friend is asking.

Even in 1984, it was clear that it was not enough merely to change the management structure. The new DGDQA inherited more than a dozen geographically separated sites: it was very widely dispersed. If overheads were to be cut and staff numbers substantially reduced, a programme of consolidation on to fewer sites was clearly needed. Some changes could be accomplished quickly—for example, sites at Plumstead in south-east London and Harefield in Middlesex were closed, and their facilities were moved to existing accommodation at Woolwich. However, we were still left with DGDQA operating from three large sites —Royal Arsenal west, Royal Arsenal east at Woolwich, and the Aquila site at Bromley, all in south-east London, and a number of smaller sites around the country.

A study suggested three main options—to continue on the three main sites, to collocate on to the main site of Royal Arsenal west, or to collocate on Teesside, which was considered then the best location for a totally new build

[Mr. Carlisle]

option. On the basis of initial estimates of construction costs and tested by investment appraisal, the Teesside option emerged then as the most cost-effective solution. In March 1989, my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury), announced our proposal to move 1,500 DGDQA posts to Preston Farm on Teesside between 1993 and 1995. It was subsequently agreed to add to the package the remaining outstation establishments employing a further 100 staff. Thus, the final package comprised the 1,100 technical support staff and some 500 headquarters and support personnel.

Early in 1990, external project managers were engaged, part payment was made on the main part of the Preston Farm site, and detailed planning was set in hand. At this point I would like to express my appreciation for the co-operation and expert assistance of local authorities on Teesside, and in particular the Teesside development corporation, within whose area the site is located.

As work progressed, it became clear that to replicate on Teesside all existing DGDQA facilities, including the outstations, would cost substantially more than the sum budgeted on the basis of earlier broad-brush and non-site-specific costings——

Mr. Holt *rose——*

Mr. Carlisle: No, I will not give way yet. My hon. Friend must let me develop my argument. I will give way later.

This was the case even though the plans and costings were based on a reduction in the area of buildings of some 20 per cent. compared with existing accommodation. When the details were worked out, it became quite clear that, because of the specific needs of the DGDQA, the costs were substantially more than we had initially anticipated.

Mr. Holt *rose——*

Mr. Carlisle: I am rather anxious to reply to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South. It is his debate.

Rather than plough on regardless, which would have been quite wrong, a decision was taken in August 1990 not to cancel or deter the project, but to put it on hold for a short period while we considered how estimated costs might be reduced. That was perfectly reasonable in view of the fact that public money was being spent.

Mr. Holt *rose——*

Mr. Carlisle: No, I will not give way. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South has raised these matters; it is his debate.

Design studies had been taken to a point where the cost of constructing individual technical facilities had been identified and it was therefore possible to target these facilities and establish whether costs could be reduced by lowering technical specifications, reducing the size of the building or considering whether a particular task might be undertaken more cheaply or efficiently elsewhere in the Ministry of Defence or by industry.

Mr. Holt *rose——*

Mr. Carlisle: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South to make his point.

Mr. Holt: Yes, I do have his permission. The Minister keeps talking about replicating on Teesside. This is relocating on Teesside, not replicating. If one relocates, one does not need the facilities that are down in the south; one relocates to the north, and one does not have the expenditure that replication involves.

Mr. Carlisle: When I talk about "replication", I mean that one has to transfer some of the existing activities in the south up to the north, so one needs to build fairly costly facilities to undertake those operations. We looked, therefore, to see whether we could recast our designs and costs to make the transfer cheaper.

However, this is a more complex matter than might be appreciated, as the technical support directorate conducts tests across a range of disciplines, such as materials science, mechanical engineering, electronics and software engineering, on products ranging from main battle tanks and guns, through fuels and lubricants to explosives and micro-electronics. As my hon. Friends will understand, it is a complicated business. These studies have gone well and, although the gap between the August 1990 costings and the sum budgeted has been reduced substantially by our work, it has not been eliminated.

I have, therefore, asked the Department to identify the further facilities that would have to be cut to get down to budget and what the implications of cutting or reducing capabilities would be, both operationally and financially. When looking at the wider picture, we have to consider, for example, whether cutting capabilities would merely transfer costs to other parts of the Department.

Before ministerial colleagues are invited to take a final decision on the project, I have also asked officials to consider—as circumstances have changed considerably since initial feasibility studies were conducted four years ago—whether costs might be reduced by moving to a site where construction costs could be lower than those anticipated at Preston Farm. This essentially implies a site where surplus good quality technical facilities already exist. Local authorities and central government regional offices have identified several sites on Teesside and elsewhere in the north-east of England which, without prejudice, are worth further consideration and will be inspected within the next week to see whether significant savings, compared with Preston Farm, could be achieved.

As the House will be aware, the process of rationalisation and slimming down, which led to the creation of DGDQA, has continued across the Ministry of Defence and will continue for several years, not least following the "Options for Change" studies, and the decision, following "next steps", to create agencies where that promises to be the most effective way forward. We are in the middle of a substantial programme of change in the Ministry of Defence, and we cannot ignore that in making the decision on DGDQA.

I have therefore asked my Department to consider whether any existing Ministry of Defence sites that might be scheduled for closure could accommodate DGDQA with the prospect of significant savings compared to Preston Farm. Only one such site has been identified, and that is in the south-west of England. It is the Admiralty research establishment, Southwell, at Portland in Dorset

which, as the staff, my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) and other interested parties have been told earlier today, is to be the subject of a study as part of a review of ARE facilities.

DGDQA has been asked to examine, if ARE Southwell were to close, what the savings, if any, might be compared to those of Preston Farm. I must, of course, stress that the closure of the ARE site and its occupancy by DGDQA are no more than possibilities at this stage, and no decisions have been taken. No decision has been taken on the naval base at Portland either.

I am aware that there are hon. Members who question the need for DGDQA to move away from London. I have to say that, although we will re-run our investment appraisals once the above studies are completed, the work conducted to date by our project managers suggests that the cost of necessary reconstruction on London sites were DGDQA to remain on them is likely to be far higher than for sites outside London and that moving out of London will yield lower staff costs and other running costs in the long term.

To sum up, our cost reduction exercises are almost complete. We will look sympathetically at Preston Farm. If all things were equal, we should like to move to the north, but, in reality, we have to consider all the interests carefully in the purpose of good government. We have to consider the interests of the taxpayer as well as the efficiency of the operation and the availability of spare buildings. It is my responsibility to see that all the options are taken and considered.

Although I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South, and although I have considered seriously the wish that DGDQA should go to his constituency, the right way to proceed is to examine all the options if the public is to get proper value for money. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for initiating this debate, and for his understanding and tolerance in the task that we face.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 25 January 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Licensed Betting Shops

9.34 am

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): This petition concerns the rights and feelings of 1,300 people who currently work in licensed betting shops in the United Kingdom. These people feel powerless against a shabby employer who seems intent upon imposing upon them conditions of employment that none of them wants. The petition reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble Petition of the undersigned being employees of bookmakers operating licensed betting offices throughout the nation sheweth.

That we are genuinely concerned that consideration is currently being given by the Home Secretary to a change in the law to allow betting shops to be open to the public until 9.30 pm in weekday evenings.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House does not agree to such changes in existing law unless or until:

(a) A satisfactory level of shop security is agreed between the bookmaking companies and ACTS acting on our behalf.

(b) A satisfactory agreement covering salaries, conditions and meal breaks is agreed between bookmaking companies and ACTS acting on our behalf.

(c) Proper and meaning consultations are undertaken by Government Departments or their agents with the communities who would be most likely affected by such legal changes.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Bangor (Development)

9.37 am

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I regard it as a matter of honour to be entrusted with the presentation of this petition to Parliament. It has been signed in a relatively short time—that time has been dictated by the urgency of the matter—by almost 6,000 residents of Bangor, young and old—people of all political views and of all religious views. The petition reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble petition of residents of Bangor and elsewhere Sheweth.

That we fear the imminent destruction of the beautiful seaside resort of Bangor. In addition to the placing of a car park on the sea front, construction work has started on an administration building, Bregenz house, which will be fifty feet high and which has not yet received planning permission.

It has long been the policy of the council, indeed since the last century, that all construction work directly on the seafront of Bangor should be discouraged.

This latest development therefore represents a major change of direction with no mandate from the people of Bangor, who have not been given any warning about the size of the administration building.

Such enormous premises will clearly be the first step in wholesale development of the seafront, which could prevent residents and visitors from the enjoyment of the seafront and what is left of the view of Bangor bay.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to provide a local referendum. Any further building work on the seafront, including Bregenz house, should be stopped until the opinion of the people of Bangor is voiced.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Pig Husbandry Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.38 am

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill could scarcely be shorter or about a more simple issue. The question is whether a sow should have around its neck a narrow loop with a chain at the end of it just 2ft long—I have one here. The sow is kept in that state for four months from when it is served by a boar until it goes out to a farrowing crate. Some would say that the alternative of a stall is worse. It is so narrow that the sow cannot turn around. It can only stand up or lie down and, at best, move only a few inches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) knows that just over half a century ago I was deputed, as a schoolboy during the war, to look after sows. I learnt that, of all the farm animals, the pig is the most intelligent. In the intervening years, I have kept many thousands of pigs. There is no doubt that the more intelligent the animal—I suppose that this applies also to the human being—the more easily it is frustrated and placed under stress. To keep an animal such as a pig in a condition where it cannot move for four months, other than just to stand up or to lie down, causes acute stress.

It is not a pleasant sight to see a young sow put in one of these stalls for the first time. The sow is likely to struggle for half an hour or three quarters of an hour and in that time it will scream and eventually subside. One of two things then tends to happen: either for the rest of the four months it becomes listless and fails to respond to stimuli, other than food put immediately in front of it, or it rapidly becomes mentally deranged, and when the animal is released after the four months to go into the farrowing crate, it is often aggressive and vicious and it may attack the stockman.

I therefore congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on his statement about this system. He could not have put it more strongly when, in a press release this week, he said that the system

"could not be justified in any circumstances".

He echoed the views of every livestock farmer who is conscious of his responsibilities to his animals and who realises that livestock farming is acquiring a bad name because of the minority who persist in using the system.

I very much regret the fact that the National Pig Breeders Association, of which I was long a member—indeed, I have been an office holder—has decided to oppose the Bill. The association alleges that about 70 per cent. of sows are kept in these conditions. I do not believe that that figure is right. My hon. Friend the Minister knows that Dr. Baxter was appointed some time ago to the Farm Animal Welfare Council. I do not suppose that any academic is more familiar with the problem. He has studied it at length. In his view, 50 per cent. of sows are kept in these conditions and the number is declining.

It follows that many farmers, like me, do not regard this system as necessary. In several papers on the subject and with the support of many other academics who have studied it, along with veterinarians and livestock farmers, Dr. Baxter said that the problems of keeping sows closely covered and in stalls will continue and will probably never be overcome. Those people and the majority of those of us involved in the livestock business know that there are many other systems. I had sows on outdoor and indoor systems. Over the many years that I kept sows, I experimented with different systems. It is true that every system has some little difficulty—there is no perfect system—but, on the whole, the difficulties associated with the alternatives are minimal. Much research has been carried out into them in recent years. For that and other reasons, a large number of farmers have moved out of the existing systems of sow stalls and close tethering. One cannot give figures, because no precise ones are available, but the majority of pig farmers do not use the systems any more.

There is a large number of large herds. There are several large herds of 1,000 or more sows in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). I have been to the famous college in his constituency twice to talk about pig husbandry and I met his constituents, some of whom have these 1,000 sow herds in stalls or on close tethers. I had my ups and downs with them. I said that that system made for lazy stockmanship and that lazy stockmanship was bad stockmanship. They could not disagree with me, because most of the farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency who own those huge herds do not feed or look after the pigs but sit behind mahogany desks, with computers, secretaries and accountants running their large businesses.

This business has been indirectly subsidised by the taxpayer. I do not believe that these sow stalls would ever have come into being in this country had it not been for the tax allowances which were available.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): My hon. Friend realises that feelings in my constituency were running rather high after the rather insulting remarks that he was purported to have made and which were published in the press. If I have an opportunity to do so, I shall deal more fully with that matter later. Will my hon. Friend be good enough to tell me and the House how many pig units in my constituency he has visited and which they were?

Sir Richard Body: I have not been to any of them. I have been to two conferences on this subject at the famous college in my hon. Friend's constituency, where I spoke at length. I have visited many pig farmers. When I was actively involved in pig farming and was experimenting, naturally I went to many such farmers to see what others were doing. I am glad to say that many of my fellow pig farmers came to see what I was doing and we exchanged ideas.

I am disturbed by my hon. Friend's use of the word "insulting". I did not wilfully insult anyone. I said some rather forthright things about those farmers who were letting down the farming community. I emphasise that the strongest support I have received for the Bill is from livestock farmers who are worried about their reputation. I have also had enormous support from the veterinary profession, especially among working vets who visit farms and see the injuries caused to sows. There is no doubt in their mind of the mental stress caused to the pigs.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): While it is one thing to criticise my hon. Friend for his forthright remarks on this matter, we should also draw attention to the

remarks made this morning on radio by the chief executive of the National Pig Breeders Association. He sought to impugn the motives of hon. Members when he had no way of knowing the reason for our views. He sought to suggest that there was something improper in hon. Members supporting the Bill. By doing so he does himself, his organisation and its members a grave disservice and he should be ashamed.

Sir Richard Body: I have been saddened about what the National Pig Breeders Association has done recently. I was a member of it for a long time and an office holder. In those days I got to know many association members and I do not believe that any of them would have contemplated introducing such a stall system. However, the association has sought to attract many more of the large-scale, commercial producers and I suspect that those types now effectively run the association. I do not want to be over-critical of association members, but it is important to note that if one is actively farming seven days a week and one enjoys looking after one's stock, there is no time to go to London, or wherever the committee meetings may be, to play an active part in that association.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's knowledge of my constituency. Does he therefore recognise that the south-west branch of the National Pig Breeders Association consists of those who run small businesses rather than large ones? Those farmers care deeply about their stock and they undertake the difficult task of finding time to come to London to participate in the association. I hope to speak later, but does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Bill goes through, the larger, commercial pig breeders will possess the ability to fall into line with the new regulations while the small farms will be driven out of business?

Sir Richard Body: I do not believe that I have ever disagreed with my hon. Friend before, but I feel that I must on this occasion.

My hon. Friend knows that I go down to the west country from time to time and that I keep an eye on what is going on in the pig business there—I cannot help but do that. I believe that the casualties will be those farmers—sometimes I wonder whether they should be described as such—who have thousand-sow herds. They had their stall systems established as a result of tax allowances that no longer exist.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Like my hon. Friend, I have kept pigs in the past and I care greatly for their welfare. My hon. Friend, however, has portrayed pig farmers, particularly those who run large farms, as not caring for their stock. The practices that my hon. Friend has described are also widespread on the continent—perhaps more so than in Britain—and they have developed over a long time. Those practices have been accepted by the majority of people in agriculture—my hon. Friend is an exception—until recently. Most farmers care for their stock and, as my hon. Friend is well aware, unhappy stock does not thrive. Farmers would not keep their stock in conditions where it did not thrive. I agree that changes may be necessary now, but to attribute to pig farmers evil, malicious and uncaring feelings is unfair.

Sir Richard Body: I am not so sure. I am complaining about a minority. I do not believe that the majority—I am almost willing to bet on it—keep pigs simply to make money. I can speak with some authority about making money or losses from keeping pigs—one can do both. The majority who keep stock, be it cattle, pigs, sheep or anything else have a feeling for those animals. Those who work in the fields, or in the piggeries, and look after those animals have a feel for them. I am not arguing about that majority; I am concerned about a problem that touches the minority.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I could take my hon. Friend to many small pig breeding farms in Sussex where the farmers have provided open areas in which the pigs can run. The difference between those and the filthy, disgusting stalls in which pigs are chained is colossal. Does my hon. Friend agree that certain elements of the farming world display a degree of hypocrisy when they try to pretend that they care for those pigs, while they treat them like that? My hon. Friend has already shown to the House the restrictions that are placed upon pigs.

Sir Richard Body: I agree with my hon. Friend.

I have challenged the National Pig Breeders Association and the National Farmers Union, whose representatives I met recently, to give me the names of any farmers who have gone over to the ultra-intensive form of production in the past three years. So far, no names have been given and I do not believe that there will be any. Dr. Baxter, to whom I referred earlier, has also made inquiries and I am reassured by his findings. Manufacturers of the chains have also told me that there are no more sales, which is a great advance.

When we had a generous system of grants and tax allowances one could receive a large grant for putting down the concrete base for the intensive pig farms. One also received a tax allowance, over seven years, for erecting the buildings. The equipment, the sow stalls and tethers, could be written off against one year's tax. Those with large farms and receiving a substantial income had a considerable advantage over those with small farms whose income was not as great and whose tax liability, therefore, was not enough to enable them to take advantage of the tax allowances. It is not unfair to say that it is the taxpayer, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has been largely responsible for the introduction of the stall system.

I remind the House that as long ago as 1981 the Select Committee on Agriculture, under the chairmanship of Bill Elliott—now in another place—carried out a long and detailed inquiry on the stall system. We visited many farms in Britain and in France, Germany and Denmark where we examined their practices not only on the farms, but in research establishments. We heard a great deal of evidence and at the end we agreed unanimously on the report. The House has always respected the unanimous report of a Select Committee. It is 10 years since we agreed that report which came down against the ultra-intensive methods of pig husbandry.

The House subsequently spent a whole day debating the report, which also made recommendations about the more controversial question of poultry and veal. On pig husbandry—in particular, sow stalls and close tethering—the House agreed unanimously what the Select Committee had decided. There have been disagreements on all sorts of issues in the Select Committee and the House will know that it consists of some fairly hard-faced hon. Members. I must not be unkind about my colleagues,

[Sir Richard Body]

but they were certainly not sentimental about the matter; let us say that they were practical. Nevertheless, those of us who brought to the Committee a considerable knowledge of livestock farming were appalled at some of the things that we saw.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): My hon. Friend has described accurately the acceptance of the report by the House, but the matter went even further than that. The 1983 guidelines issued by the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), said:

"The keeping of sows and gilts in stalls, with or without tethers, raises serious welfare problems. It inevitably places severe restrictions on the animals' freedom of movement . . . alternative systems, such as kennels, store yards or yards and cubicles, in which animals' behavioural and exercise needs can be fully met, are therefore strongly recommended."

So by 1983 the Government had accepted the basic thrust of the Select Committee's report.

Sir Richard Body: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Perhaps I may digress for a moment, because I realise that my hon. Friend the Minister is none too happy about the five-year period. Let me explain why it was selected. The lifespan of the stalls is usually about 15 years; the tethers have a considerably shorter lifespan. The Select Committee reached its decision 10 years ago and there was a considerable amount of reporting in the farming press when the report was published and debated. I cannot believe that any livestock farmer can have been unaware of what the Select Committee or the House had said. Moreover, when the welfare code was published in 1983, there can have been no doubt about the matter among pig farmers because, again, there was a considerable amount of publicity. If my arithmetic is right, 10 plus five makes 15. That means that by 1996, 15 years will have elapsed since the Select Committee unhesitatingly drew those conclusions which were then endorsed by the House.

There is another matter that concerns a number of producers. Will the European dimension put our farmers at a disadvantage compared with farmers on the continent, and will there be an increase in imports from countries that have a lower regard for their animals than we do? I do not think that will happen. I have given the matter careful thought. I have discussed it with a number of farmers and others. It will not happen because, in the first place, the system is not profitable. It has been made artificially profitable, as I sought to explain earlier, by the tax allowance. If it were profitable, the sow stall systems would not be disappearing as rapidly as it is. The figures show clearly that farmers are abandoning the system and, in the past three years, have not been replacing sow stalls that have ended their natural life. Any hon. Member who has an appreciable number of pig farmers in his constituency will know that pig farmers have had a pretty rough old time in the past few years and that pig farming is not always a highly profitable business. There has been acute pressure on farmers at the margins. One might have thought that that would be reflected in intensified systems and certainly more farmers would have gone over to sow stalls and tethering if that system had been seen to be more profitable. That is simply not the case.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I have a lot of pig farmers in my constituency. Indeed, we bred pigs when I was a child. Does my hon. Friend agree that the real reason why pig farmers have been under such economic pressure and have been going out of business is that they have not attracted the subsidies that have been handed out to other sectors of the industry? The sums that they have been offered and the tiny tax allowances that they have received have been too modest to stop people going out of business. Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that the pig farmer deserves just as much attention in this context as the pig? I hasten to add that I support the concern about better welfare for pigs.

Sir Richard Body: My hon. Friend is enticing me and inviting me to make at least a half-hour speech on my favourite topic, but I have to keep an eye on the Chair and I would be monstrously out of order if I answered my hon. Friend's question, tempted though I may be. This is a short Bill on a simple issue and I must return to it.

In respect of the European dimension, there is a positive advantage in getting rid of stalls and tethers rather sooner than at the end of the five-year period. Five years is a compromise figure. Many farmers would like the system to be got rid of more speedily for commercial reasons. After all, we face competition from the continent, although I am glad to say that in recent years, we have doubled our exports of pigmeat to the continent and that has been a triumph for our farmers. There would be a marketing advantage in getting rid of the system and I look forward to hearing the Minister's views about the subject.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The Government recently decided virtually to ignore the EC's proposals on magpies and only yesterday the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that the Government would use what he called "devious means" to ensure the continuation of our various protections for horses and ponies. In the light of those facts, would not it help if the Government made it clear that they would once again fight hard—and, if need be, use devious means—to stop the import of bacon produced by those who use this appalling practice in other parts of the Community? Is not that a better answer than more subsidy, bearing in mind the fact that this year the EC is to spend £23,000 million on direct subsidy and that that is an all-time record?

Sir Richard Body: My hon. Friend is always right when he speaks about matters emanating from Brussels. I do not see why we should not invoke article 36 of the treaty of Rome to bring those imports to an end on moral grounds.

I should say that the great majority of continental farmers do not resort to the practice. Most of them still have very small pig units and it is simply not worth their while to embark on the sow stall and tether system.

Mr. Lord: My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) gave the House the global figure for agriculture subsidies. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), who knows the subject well, will surely acknowledge that the pig industry is not among those that receive massive subsidies and that it has to stand on its own feet.

Those of us who will speak today on behalf of pig producers are not against the principle of the Bill. We are trying to get a little balance into it. I represent Suffolk, which has probably the second largest population of pig producers in the country. The producers in my area are changing over to a loose housing system. I have spoken to one of my pig farmers who is also a pig consultant. He

travels widely on the continent and tells me that many of the practices in Europe are much worse than the practices and the way in which we keep our pigs here. We are considering a two-pronged issue: the first is the way in which pigs are kept on the continent and the second is unfair competition with our pig farmers. Surely such a proposal for change should be implemented at the same time throughout Europe.

Sir Richard Body: I will return to my hon. Friend's peroration shortly. However, he is right to state that pig farmers have not been subsidised. They have been taxed. Some 70 per cent. of the working costs are feed costs and that has been taxed by up to 100 per cent. That has been a severe burden for pig farmers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) knows, that tax takes the form of import levies. Many of my fellow pig farmers went out of business when we imposed very high import levies on imported maize which some of us believed was a very good feed for pigs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central is trying to lead me astray like the temptress, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West. In reply to the peroration of my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central, I refer once more to the European dimension. I believe that there is a marketing advantage and I do not suggest that our farmers should be placed at a disadvantage in relation to farmers on the continent. However, our farmers could experience a positive advantage.

There is growing concern in this country about farm animal welfare and the kind of things being done on our farms. If we can say that we have stopped the worst excesses of intensive methods of animal production and that our methods, if not totally humane, are less inhumane than practices permitted on the continent, that will be a great advantage for us to exploit commercially. We should be able to tell shoppers, "If you buy British, you will be buying bacon, ham or pork that is produced less inhumanely than is the case on the continent."

Mr. John Townend: I was interested in my hon. Friend's last point that we will be able to buy British pork that is produced more humanely than anywhere else. Why, therefore, does the Bill exclude Northern Ireland? If those practices are as evil as my hon. Friend makes out, surely they should be excluded throughout the United Kingdom. Has Northern Ireland been excluded because if the Bill applied there it would make it very difficult for pig farmers in Northern Ireland to compete with pig farmers in the Republic?

Sir Richard Body: I invite my hon. Friend to talk to those who understand the constitutional niceties. It was explained to me why it would be unwise to include Northern Ireland in the Bill, but I cannot for the life of me pass on that explanation, because it was beyond me.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I support the Bill with the utmost enthusiasm. I regret the fact that it does not extend to Northern Ireland. If I catch the eye of the Chair later, I hope to urge the House to extend the provisions to Northern Ireland. I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure in Committee that it is extended to the Province.

Sir Richard Body: As they say, that is a Committee point. My hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder)—and I insist on calling him my hon. Friend——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Needs must.

Sir Richard Body: Hon. Members may not be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for North Down and I once contested the primaries in North Down. Neither of us won on that occasion, but that was long ago.

I do not want to be diverted again from the European dimension. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) referred to the unfair advantage that Northern Ireland producers might experience. The ultra-intensive systems are not more profitable than many of the available alternatives. Those systems have been introduced—*[Interruption.]*—If I am wrong, why are those wretched systems going out rapidly now? Farmers are turning away from those systems because they are not profitable. I do not want to be unkind to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington, but I repeat what I have said in my hon. Friend's constituency on two occasions: those systems make for lazy stockmanship. It is easier for one man to control a 1,000-sow herd when those sows are kept in stalls in the conditions I have described than it would be if those sows were in open yards or kept in any of the other ways in which we can keep our pigs.

Mr. John Townend: My hon. Friend's argument lacks logic. On the one hand he says that it is no more efficient or economic to have the present system while on the other hand he says that that system leads to lazy stockmanship and that we can manage with fewer men. If labour costs rise as a result of changing the system, the present system must be more cost effective. A pig farmer in my constituency has just erected one of those units that my hon. Friend claims is going out. There is no great movement out of the present system in east Yorkshire, which is the largest pig-producing area in the country.

Sir Richard Body: Of course labour costs are important. However, they are not the biggest costs involved. In relation to feed costs, they are very small. The great majority of pig farmers do not count their labour costs because they are working farmers. A working farmer does not look at the clock and calculate how much he has or has not earned that day. He gets on with the work and works seven days a week. Labour costs are not a significant item in the budget of the average pig farmer.

I am determined to return to the European dimension. I will not give way, no matter how tempted I might be, to my hon. Friends. I will not digress again. Before I was interrupted, I was inviting my hon. Friend the Minister to respond about the commercial advantages. Only quite recently I received an invitation from Safeway, which is one of the major supermarket chains, to see what it is doing to provide more humanely produced meat. I was very impressed by what I saw.

Safeway has commenced farming to increase the supply of the kind of meat that it wants, because the supply of humanely produced meat was not available elsewhere. Safeway is charging its customers in the supermarkets a 25 per cent. premium for such meat. Safeway is successful and it hopes to recruit more farmers who are willing to keep animals humanely and in return receive that 25 per cent.

[Sir Richard Body]

premium. As a commercial concern, Safeway is convinced that consumer demand for humanely produced meat will increase and it is determined to meet that demand. I must not put words into Safeway's mouth, and I am not doing so, but it would be enormously grateful if some farmers in north Humberside would contemplate using other methods. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington to take the message to farmers that the demand for humanely produced meat will increase and that it would be excellent if some of them abandoned some of their ultra-intensive methods.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Most of the problems of the pig market stem from the fact that supermarkets are creating a very low price for pig products. The idea of Safeway giving anyone a 25 per cent. premium would probably cause a farmer in Hampshire to fall over in astonishment. That is not to detract from my hon. Friend's Bill—I am 100 per cent. behind what he is trying to achieve—but supermarkets are one of the reasons why that vicious practice has built up in the past.

Sir Richard Body: I must agree with my hon. Friend. However, I am totally resolved not to be diverted by anyone else again. I have been on my feet for much longer than I expected. It is a short, simple Bill, and we are digressing. There is a plot. I suspect that the usual channels want the Bill to be debated for as long as possible. I must now conclude.

Those of us who think seriously about livestock farming know that vegetarianism is now surging forward. In the Members' Dining Room there is now a vegetarian menu, which we certainly did not have in times past. On the blackboard menu in the cafeteria there are six, seven or eight dishes on offer, and two or three are always vegetarian. I do not suppose that a single restaurant in London does not now provide a vegetarian dish. Most significant of all, hon. Members who have visited universities or polytechnics in the past year or so and eaten in the halls or canteens will have noticed that a third and sometimes half the students are vegetarians. Intrigued by that, I have talked to them about it. There seemed to be a logical syllogism. "We cannot condone cruelty. We believe that modern meat production is cruel, therefore we do not eat meat." I do not think that one can fault the logic of that syllogism.

It is important, therefore, that those of us who are concerned about the future of livestock farming should clean up its reputation and put right what we believe to be wrong. It is not only what we in the livestock industry believe to be wrong; almost every inquiry including every scientific inquiry has condemned those ultra-intensive practices, and the sooner they are got rid of the better it will be for the reputation of farming. At the last annual general meeting of the National Pig Breeders Association the chairman said:

> "The time has come when the UK pig industry must start to improve its public image."

He went on:

> "The case for promoting our product more effectively to the consumer must be advanced within the framework of the need to burnish our reputation with the general public."

I agree with that statement, and I hope that House will also agree. I hope also that the National Pig Breeders Association will think carefully about what it has been saying recently.

The Bill is obviously in the interests not only of wretched sows that are kept in stalls for four months at a time, with the stress and the lack of will to live that so many of them suffer as a result, but of every livestock farmer.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am privileged to follow the promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). I pay tribute to his work on the Bill. He is one of the few Back-Bench Conservative Members of whom I had heard before I was elected. I have a brother who is involved in organic farming in Northern Ireland and he mentioned to me the work that the hon. Gentleman had done not only on this issue but on many other farming issues to put across the organic message. I agree with every word that the hon. Gentleman has said.

This is a small, narrow, definitive Bill and we should be able to pass it very quickly. I hope that there will not be any of the procedural or tactical delaying methods in which the House seems to involved itself. Let us have a straightforward debate and then vote on the Bill. I hope that hon. Members will support it.

I shall tell hon. Members of my own interest in the measure and why I feel passionately about it. I am a product of the pig industry. I was brought up on a small rural farm in Northern Ireland. I do not think that I would be here were it not for pigs, because that was the way in which my family made their money and ensured that I was able to be brought up in a way that would help me in my future life. That pig farm was a genuine pig farm. I am confident that I have delivered more young pigs into this world than many other hon. Members have. Therefore, I know just how intelligent pigs are.

I support everything that has been said. Pigs are the most intelligent farm animals. I could relate many examples—I shall not bore the House—of sows who, no matter what was done, were able to open the gate and get back in when they wanted to. When they were let out into the field for the day and got fed up they always knew how to get back in. No matter what we did, one sow was able to let herself out. She could even manipulate and get rid of the wire that had been used to secure the gate. Pigs are extremely intelligent, clean animals. Anyone who has looked after pigs knows that, unlike many other animals, they perform their bodily functions on exactly the same spot and at the same time, practically, and will never mess up the place in which they are kept. That is why it is disgraceful and appalling that pigs in this country are still being kept in the way that has been described.

I do not believe that any genuine farmer—that is, someone who cares first and foremost about the animals that he or she looks after—could possibly oppose the Bill. I understand why hon. Members from areas in which there is industrial intensive farming have been lobbying hard on the matter. I understand that there are pressures on them, but I urge them to realise that the people exerting that pressure are not genuine farmers. A genuine farmer would not use such methods of husbandry.

The Bill is not about the economics of pig farming and the problems of commercialism in farming. There is time for that in another debate. We are not here to discuss what tax advantages should or should not have been given to the

pig industry, although I have firm views on that. I entirely agreed with many of the promoter's remarks. The Bill is about stopping an unacceptable practice as quickly as possible.

One hon Gentleman said that some of the people who would go out of business and suffer most from the provisions of the Bill would be small farmers. However, if a small farmer thinks that the only way to run an economic farm is to use intensive methods, he should not be in business anyway. If that is the only way in which he can be profitable, there must be something wrong with the way in which he runs his small farm and I probably know as much as anyone here today how difficult it is these days to make small farms economic.

I plead that in Committee or at some other stage we extend the Bill to Northern Ireland. I believe that the methods described are practised very little in Northern Ireland. Many people in Northern Ireland would want the measure extended to the Province because, whether people like it or not, it is part of the United Kingdom. Laws that are applied in this country should be applied to Northern Ireland. However, that is a separate matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I apologise that I was not present to hear the beginning of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). I wish to make two points about Northern Ireland, which I am sure that the hon. Lady will confirm from her experience. I spent a year there as Minister with responsibility for agriculture. First, Northern Ireland has a separate health regime in farming which, in many cases, has led to farmers producing a healthier product. Northern Ireland would not automatically want to be treated as having the same health status as the rest of the United Kingdom. It has a higher status, which is worth protecting and which is built on separate Northern Ireland legislation.

Secondly, Northern Ireland food should have a wider reputation as more natural food. Whether or not food goes through the full organic process which the hon. Lady said was used on her brother's farm, Northern Ireland has less input and its livestock, whether chickens, pigs or cows, have a more natural life. For those reasons, people should look out for Northern Ireland produce in their shops in both the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe.

Miss Hoey: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I know that he is knowledgeable about Northern Ireland. The detail could be discussed in Committee, but I wish to see the Northern Ireland dimension brought in. I am sure that Northern Ireland farmers will welcome the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The Bill makes a start with pigs, but I hope that it will be seen as a general move away from intensive farming in general. At some stage perhaps we can come back to the House with measures on battery hens, which suffer similarly from the way in which they are reared. However, I shall not go into that now.

Even though this country is at war and thousands of people are worried about what is happening and about their families, I am pleased to say that I and, I am sure, many other hon. Members receive many letters about intensive farming. People care about it. I have certainly received more letters about it than about the Gulf crisis. I do not want to draw any comparisons, but many people in Britain care about farming methods. They have discovered that we have a real opportunity today to do something about it. It is not often that the House discusses a measure that will make a real change. I urge all hon. Members to give the Bill a Second Reading. I hope that the measure will progress and become law as quickly as possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It will be evident to the House that a large number of hon. Members wish to speak. Therefore, I hope that speeches will be reasonably brief.

10.34 am

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part early in the debate. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey). I agree in principle with much of what they said. Few hon. Members would disagree with the principle of the case that they put forward. Few of us disagree with the assertion that sow stalls are unpleasant and undesirable and that a date should be set after which they will no longer be permitted. However, some of us also argue that that date should be set across the European Community and that the absence of agreement on a date would be unfair to many pig producers in Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston almost conceded my point, if he did not actually do so. He said that large farms such as those that can be found in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and in my constituency would be casualties. That is true. Firms will suffer and go out of business in our constituencies. Members of Parliament cannot be expected to come to the House and support such a measure when other farmers a few hundred miles away on the continent will be allowed to continue the practice.

Sir Richard Body: I hope that there is no misunderstanding. I said that the only farmers who would be put at a disadvantage were those who had large herds and had gone in for what I can only call lazy and, therefore, bad stockmanship. The House should not take any step to support them. I repeat—I have said it many times already—that we do not need to fear any competition from the continent.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend and I will have to disagree on that point. Many of us believe that there will be problems of competition in the industry if we ban the practice but other countries do not do so at the same time. If we are to have fair competition, it should be EC-wide. If we are to improve animal welfare, there must be EC-wide agreement. Otherwise we shall have more imports from farms on the continent which still have sow stalls and similar systems or alternative systems which also have severe drawbacks.

We can tell farmers that the system must be brought to an end, but we have no right to make them do that when, across the channel, Dutch farmers are still building such systems and intend to use them for many years to come.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The hon. Gentleman wants to wait until we have European-wide legislation on this point. Does he follow the logic of that argument? Would he wait until any legislation was Europe-wide before we introduced it here? The Bill requires that the practice be stopped within five years. I am sure that his

[Ms. Marjorie Mowlam]

Government could work within Europe in the next five years to achieve agreement across Europe. In 1987 the European Parliament agreed to do exactly that. The hon. Gentleman stated that he agreed in principle with everything that the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) said. Does he intend to vote in accordance with that principle this morning?

Mr. Hague: We shall vote on the Bill, not the principle. [HON. MEMBERS: "No; it is the principle."]. We are voting on the principle of the Bill, but there are other principles within it.

I shall be happy to see all European Governments, including the British Government, work to achieve early agreements on the matter.

Mr. Michael Brown: I have the highest regard for my hon. Friend because his logic is usually faultless. However, this morning logic has temporarily deserted him. The Prime Minister has said that we must be in Europe and offering constructive suggestions for improvements and give a lead. Is it not eminently to the benefit of the United Kingdom in Europe if we can say, "We have done our best in our sovereign Parliament and now we challenge Europe to follow our lead." Is that not the way to proceed?

Mr. Hague: There are many ways of giving a lead to the European Community, not necessarily by implementing these proposals but by trying to persuade other countries to adopt them. However, I fear that if we adopt them and wait for others to fall into line, our example may not be followed, as has happened in other cases that right hon. and hon. Members can bring to mind.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my hon. Friend remind the House that such proposals have gone forward in various ways, but that there is fierce opposition to them from Europe's primary pig producers in the Netherlands, West Germany and Denmark? Let no one say that we have not already tried.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend makes a fair point.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Gentleman is right to argue that there should be advances across Europe, but does he realise that if the Bill is rejected today, that will be seen throughout Europe as evidence that Britain is not prepared either to take a lead or to insist on decent and humane standards? Opposing the Bill would be damaging not only to Britain but to its reputation throughout Europe.

Mr. Hague: The Government gave a clear lead in the regulations that they proposed. We do not have to sign up and vote for everything merely in order that we shall not be seen by the rest of the Community as being opposed to such measures.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is agreement in all parts of the House that improvements should be made in both the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. My view is that we should provide a lead in consumerism as well as in farm welfare. Many people in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany would like to join that movement. I suggest that my hon. Friend should employ his great oratory in explaining why it is advisable for the United Kingdom to be in advance of the rest of Europe. In that way, producers who need to change their methods would be a year or two ahead. That will produce a true image and reflection of reality—that buying British bacon and Northern Ireland pork offers an advantage. That will create a retail as well as a health advantage, and the United Kingdom will then enjoy a green, clean and healthy image. That could be combined with legislation at Community level to put a tax on slurry producers. The Netherlands is currently producing pig slurry at such a rate that it cannot dispose of it. Such a combination would produce a pincer movement of good production, good environment, and good commercial advantage for our farmers.

Mr. Hague: I wish that I could eagerly agree with my hon. Friend, but most consumers want a consistent, reliable and safely produced product at an affordable price. The risk is that they would have to obtain such a product at an affordable price from producers in other countries, using the very methods that the Bill aims to ban.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): My hon. Friend is right to argue that the measures should be implemented throughout Europe, but I understand that even the Government's proposals to phase out such practices over eight years are not dependent upon securing agreement within the Commmunity. My hon. Friend argues for something that even the Government are not proclaiming to be a fundamental requirement. Whether phasing out occurs over eight years, or over the five years proposed by my hon. Friend, which I would prefer, would it not be in the interests of United Kingdom pig producers to transform their operations as quickly as possible? Even in a commercial sense, in terms of writing off old equipment, five years is a reasonable time in which to undertake that operation.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston pointed out that 15 years is the usual life of such systems and that some last much longer. They are not all 10 years old, so it is unreasonable to claim that it would be to the farmers' commercial advantage to phase out their old systems within the next five years.

One reason why farmers have not introduced new systems in the past five years was the risk that the law would be changed, rather than because they have not wanted to run good operations. The Bill provides further evidence that that fear was justified. I am glad that not many of the old style systems are still being installed, but when that method is banned, it should be banned throughout the Community.

Sir Richard Body: I wonder how many of the farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency share his view, because, to my certain knowledge, a number of them take a different approach and strongly support the Bill. They want the phasing-out period to be as short as possible, and not more than five years. My hon. Friend looks after his constituency intensely well, but I urge him—despite the difficulty of having to represent a great number of farms—to reflect more broadly the views of his constituents.

Mr. Hague: If farmers in my constituency who do not use sow stalls were to argue other than that all farmers should be prevented from using them as quickly as possible, I would be very surprised. However, the farmers who use sow stalls make a fair point about the competition that they face from the European Community.

Mr. John Townend: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just a question of capital cost, and that there are problems inherent in the phasing out of dry sow stalls to which no one has found a solution? I refer particularly to problems that arise in the first 35 days of pregnancy, when sows can be subject to bullying that may result in abortion and the losing of pigs. Towards the end of pregnancy, many aggressive sows develop the rather unsavoury habit of vulva biting. There are welfare problems associated with the doing away of dry sow stalls.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who leads me neatly to my next point, which concerns the welfare problems inherent in other systems, with the consequence that great attention must be paid over the next few years to devising a proper alternative. In 1983, the Farm Animal Welfare Council set out four criteria: freedom from thirst, hunger, or malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; the prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury, disease or infestation; and freedom from fear and freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour. Clearly, alternative systems do not meet all those criteria in full, because it would be a normal pattern of behaviour for sows to move around much more freely than they allow.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I had not intended to intervene, because I did not want to jeopardise my chances of being called to make my own speech. My hon. Friend referred to the freedom of farm animals to indulge in normal behaviour. That has been more fully defined in these terms:

"The environment should not unduly restrict the animal's ability to perform essential maintenance activities such as grooming, nor deny it social access to others of its own species."

I ask my hon. Friend—who is a very honourable person and a great friend—to cover the broader aspects of the point that he makes. If he does not do so, it will serve not his argument but that of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body).

Mr. Hague: The criteria serve both our arguments, because while my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston and I agree that sow stalls do not meet them, and the fourth criterion in particular, the same is true of most of the alternative systems. It has proved very difficult to devise a system that meets all the criteria.

Progress with the alternatives is not very rapid. The problem with most of the alternatives is what pigs can do to each other. A few days ago, in an article in the *Financial Times*, Mr. David Richardson said:

"The trouble is, however, that pigs are pigs. When it comes to feeding time every pig will fight every other pig in its group to get more than its share of what is on offer. With young animals, say of up to six months of age, this seldom causes problems and it is unusual for injury to be caused. Larger pigs, like breeding sows, however, develop long, strong canine teeth and are capable of doing serious injury to their pen mates in their all-consuming desire for food."

There has been much research into electronic feeding of various kinds. It has taken about five years to ascertain that that is not a good alternative either.

Mr. Michael Brown: My hon. Friend might have given the impression in that quotation that Mr. Richardson was against the Bill. For the sake of his reputation, we must make it clear that he also says in that article that he does:

"not seek to maintain those intensive systems in the long term, indeed I rejected them many years ago for anthropomorphic reasons."

It is important for the sake of his reputation as a distinguished farm journalist that we do not give the impression that he is against the Bill.

Mr. Hague: I do not want the whole debate to hinge on this article by Mr. David Richardson, but I must quote the penultimate paragraph to my hon. Friend, in which he says:

"It is also vital to avoid discrimination against some UK pig producers that more economical tethers and stalls are banned in all other EC countries at the same time."

That is the point of his article. That is his opinion, and that is the opinion that I am putting forward today.

He also talks about the electronic feeding alternative and says:

"Meanwhile in recent years alternative high-tech systems have been in the course of development"—

Mr. Michael Brown: In the 17th and 18th centuries, when France and Britain both had empires and both had slavery to maintain those empires, this House unilaterally decided to abolish slavery. Does my hon. Friend think that some hon. Members opposed that on the grounds of timing, and said that we should wait until France and other empires had abolished slavery?

Mr. Hague: I recognise the force of what my hon. Friend says, but if there had been a community of European empires at the time, we might have sought to abolish it at a stroke rather than set an example as an individual empire.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) has fled to the other side of the Chamber in disgust. There are problems with alternative systems——

Miss Emma Nicholson *rose*——

Mr. Hague: I shall not give way many more times, but I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Miss Nicholson: It might be right for my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) to have fled to the other side of the Chamber because the Member of Parliament who spoke against the removal of slavery and indentured labour was William Gladstone, who I suspect must have sat over there, too.

Mr. Hague: I think that Mr. Gladstone sat on both sides of the Chamber at various times. However, we had better get back to the matter in hand.

There are problems with alternative systems. For example, the problem with automatic feeding systems is that pigs lose their transponders and find that they cannot eat. Without good stockmanship, they may go days or, as has been reported, weeks without any food. Without extremely good stockmanship, it can be difficult to give pigs the injections that they need because they can be hard to handle and to separate. We need a higher standard of stockmanship. After a time the passage of measures such as this Bill, will help to improve standards, but again it is important that there should be fair competition throughout the European Community. We should develop the matter, but we should do it with the rest of the European Community.

The Government have recognised that fact in their previous responses to the Farm and Animal Welfare Council. For example, paragraph 16 of the Government's response in March 1989 states:

[Mr. Hague]

"The argument put forward by some interested parties that alternatives already exist which are completely satisfactory in both economic and welfare terms is not accepted by FAWC or by the Government. While alternative systems may operate successfully with good management, the Government does not believe that these housing systems, catering for modern large herds, are yet at a sufficiently proven stage for existing stall and tether systems to be phased out on a national basis. Indeed, unless management is of a high enough standard, loose housing systems can lead to poorer welfare."

Paragraph 17 states:

"From an economic viewpoint it is also clear that any move away from stalls into alternative systems could place producers at a competitive disadvantage unless the alternative could be run at a similar level of cost. Precipitate unilateral action could therefore encourage the import of pigmeat from other Member States produced from animals bred in stalls. For these reasons the Government believes that it is particularly important to take action on dry sow stalls on a Community basis, so that the measures affect all producers in all Member States together."

That is the central argument used by the Government in their response to the FAWC, and that is my argument today.

I shall also quote from a recent EC document the opinion of the European Parliament, which expressed the view on 12 March last year that:

". . . it is . . . recognised that some group-housing systems could also lead to welfare problems such as vulva-biting"—

to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) referred—

"and excessive fighting which is mainly associated with feeding activities.

1.4 Although research is being carried out to solve the problems posed by group-housing it was not yet so far advanced that a definite recommendation could be made to prohibit the use of sow stalls and/or tethers in favour of the group-housing systems."

Those are the difficulties mentioned by the European Parliament which our Government also mentioned so forcefully in their response to the FAWC in March 1989.

The position of the European Community causes us a great problem. It seems that its modest proposals to prohibit the use of sow stalls in the first four weeks or so after weaning are now intended only to come into effect on 1 January 2005, and further proposals are awaiting a report to the European Commission which is due in January 1993. So the European Community is not exactly moving with lightning speed. The Government could make a great contribution by increasing the speed, which is lacking within the European Community on this issue, rather than by taking unilateral action in this country. It is important to have EC-wide——

Ms. Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me twice. If the hon. Gentleman agrees with this measure in principle and wants this change in the long run, surely if he and other hon. Members do not support the Second Reading they will not be giving the Government the support that they may be looking for to enable them to decrease the number of years. Surely, given the case that the hon. Gentleman is making, he thinks that we should back the principle and support the Bill this morning.

Mr. Hague: I am doing my bit for supporting the principle by speaking for it in the House today. We shall see how the debate goes and how many Members support the Bill later. We all have the opportunity to make it clear that we are probably almost entirely united about the principle behind the Bill.

I shall now try to conclude, as I have taken a lot of interventions and I must deal with the remainder of my argument. If we do not have an EC agreement, we shall not be helping pig welfare. Dutch and Spanish pork is likely to come into this country, produced in conditions which are banned in this country. The change will be extremely expensive for the British farmer. A farmer in my constituency quoted a cost of £400 or £500 per stall if he had to get rid of all his stall systems. Moreover, each year one or two pigs fewer per sow are produced, so this part of the industry will be less productive and less efficient, but it would have to compete with European producers who remained just as productive and efficient as before. This would clearly be a further disadvantage to an industry which already frequently does not compete on equal terms in the Community and which has often suffered many disadvantages because of the green pound, and so on.

In some ways the problem is similar to that with eggs. We have brought in safety regulations which have not applied to the rest of the Community. As a result, imports have come in, produced in circumstances that we would not allow, or at least on which we would check. But this case is worse, because there is a powerful argument for saying that British eggs are safer to eat—but we would not even have that advantage in the pig industry.

We are in grave danger of damaging the industry in the name of welfare, thereby assisting farmers on the continent who do not propose at the same time to improve the welfare of their animals. That is why I have such grave doubts about the Bill.

11.2 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am pleased to support this Bill, although some might be surprised at that, as I represent probably the biggest pig-producing area in Scotland. Aberdeenshire accounts for 50 per cent. of all the pigs reared in Scotland. There are also some distinguished research establishments there, engaged in research into pig behaviour and husbandry. The North of Scotland college of agriculture is the leading research unit into pig husbandry in Scotland.

One of the most distinguished research institutes in my constituency is the Rowett research institute, which deals with animal nutrition. Its director is Professor James, who made his reputation as a human nutritionist. One of the great changes that he brought about was to direct his researchers to recognise the demands being brought to bear on agriculture by consumers, in terms of the quality of the product produced on British farms and of the methods by which it is produced. I wholly agree with the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) that the public's anxieties about how agricultural products are brought to market are a significant and growing factor in the marketing of agricultural produce and that farmers fail to respond to that factor at their peril. That is why the Bill deserves considerable support.

Driving around my constituency I have been interested to note the increasing numbers of pigs in fields, in open housing units. Clearly, that is an increasingly popular trend. If he were allowed to speak here, my noble Friend Lord Mackie of Banshie would be delighted to regale hon. Members at great length with stories of his innovative free-range pig farming and of the considerable commercial success that he has had since taking it up a few years ago.

Arguments about the problems of investment are valid, but they are wasting arguments. The hon. Member for Holland with Boston said that no one had been able to demonstrate to him evidence of investment in new large-scale dry sow stall schemes in the past three years. He is asking for a five-year phase-out period, so the newest conceivable scheme would be eight years old by the time the Bill came into effect. That approximates to the depreciation that would take place in any case and it is more than ample time in which to take account of the changes that would be required.

Aberdeenshire is also renowned for the quality of its beef production, and there is a lesson in that, too. During the past year of the BSE scare and the problems of the feedstuffs given to cattle, which had induced BSE in the first place, the farms in Aberdeenshire that have traditionally raised cattle using normal farming methods were able to show that the risks and incidence of BSE on their farms were minimal and that the disease's eradication was almost assured by virtue of the fact that they had never embarked on methods of feeding animals unnaturally with foodstuffs that did not form part of their normal cycle. Cattle are vegetarian and, if they had been treated as such, BSE would never have developed in the first place.

All this shows that traditional livestock methods are ultimately safer and that they measure up better to consumer demands.

I have been in touch with the Scottish agricultural college in Aberdeen, which agrees with the Government's position. I have been an hon. Member for nearly eight years and in the first year after my election I was bombarded with letters about dry sow stalls, so I took the time and trouble to go to the research unit at the North of Scotland college of agriculture to find out about the potential problems and about what progress was being made. One of the things that stuck in my mind from my visit was the research that the unit had carried out into the natural behaviour of pigs. There was no dispute about the fact that when they are pregnant and preparing to farrow, pigs naturally build nests. They gather straw, usually against a wall or shelter, and farrow there.

It was pointed out to me that dry sow stalls were first introduced partly because it was believed that they improved the welfare of pigs. I accept that there are difficulties associated with alternative methods which, for example, would reduce the mortality rate of piglets because the sows can roll over and crush them, but we must take into account natural animal behaviour. For instance, how much stress is caused to pigs by imposing unnatural methods on them? What effect does that have on the quality of the product and, increasingly importantly, on the consumer?

The hon. Member for Holland with Boston pertinently pointed out that a growing proportion of young people are vegetarian—he mentioned up to 50 per cent. of college students——

Sir Richard Body: Between one third and one half.

Mr. Bruce: I do not dispute it. A significant number of young people are becoming vegetarians. I can testify that some of them grow out of that later, but between 10 and 15 per cent. of the whole population now regard themselves as wholly or partly vegetarian. I represent a livestock-producing area which produces high-quality livestock in natural ways that are acceptable—in most cases—to the consumer, and we should continue to develop such practices. If we do not, more and more people will say that they are not prepared to eat meat, either because they do not like how it is produced or because they do not trust what they are told about how it is produced. The industry needs to clean up its act.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am sometimes described as partly vegetarian, but many of us might be better described as partly meat eaters. The problem is how to produce that meat so that it appears more attractive to more of us in ways that seem more justifiable to people who care about the welfare of animals.

Mr. Bruce: That is a fair interpolation.

I greatly respect the research work being carried out in my constituency. I accept that it has identified problems with the switch. The Minister looks at me quizzically, perhaps thinking that he has an answer to that. He is inevitably involved in European Community negotiations. If the Community can decide to go for a single market over five years, surely British farmers can decide to do away with dry sow stalls over the same time scale. Theirs is a rather smaller undertaking.

I wholly agree that it would be desirable to persuade the whole European Community to move with us. Nobody who supports the Bill would demur from urging the Government to do everything in their power to persuade other Community members to adopt the standards that we are trying to impose. I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) that if the Bill does not go through the authority of the Minister to speak in Europe will be substantially weakened.

British people and consumers are demanding this change and the fact that many British farmers are already responding to it is a telling point. Denmark and Holland are British pig farmers' two main competitors and may well not wish to move in this direction at present. However, those two EC countries have sophisticated consumer and environmental lobbies. If Britain takes a lead, it will be difficult for pig farmers in Holland and Denmark to sustain their determination to resist that development.

Mr. Lord: The hon. Gentleman said that he had spoken to universities and colleges about the way in which sow stalls were originally introduced. Will he confirm that, although we are now a little wiser about such matters, when they were introduced they were seen as the best way to proceed for the welfare of the pig and for better profits? Now we are wiser, but it is unfair to attribute to pig farmers the kind of motives that were given to them earlier.

Mr. Bruce: I wholly accept the argument that when those stalls were introduced they were believed to be beneficial to the sows. We now know better and my research establishments confirm that. Therefore, the argument is not about that issue but only about timing. Those establishments support the Government, but I do not. I believe that the hon. Member for Holland with Boston has the right approach.

We must grasp this nettle and show that we are prepared to give a lead. We all know from our postbags that thousands if not millions of people would desperately like to see the House at last grasp at least one nettle in relation to animal welfare. That is always difficult to do.

[Mr. Bruce]

We can always find reasons for saying that a proposed system is not perfect or that the timing is wrong and that there is more to be done. I am wholly in favour of giving more money to my research institutions to enable them to demonstrate the validity of alternatives.

The fact that no other method is perfect is not a reason for not phasing out a system that everybody agrees is no longer in the best interests of pigs and is no longer acceptable. We should move to the speedy adoption of natural methods that comply with the natural behaviour and instincts of the animal and which the growing demands by consumers that animals used for human consumption should be reared in humane conditions that most closely approximate to their natural behaviour. British consumers will increasingly demand that and, in their own interests, British livestock farmers would be wise to respond.

11.13 am

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on his Bill. I am delighted to be one of its sponsors. I hope that it will be the first of many Bills dealing with the blight of factory farming which is now far too prevalent in our countryside.

Those who are opposed to the Bill but who are not prepared to say so openly have put up smokescreens. The Bill is about cruelty and suffering. It makes more of our people aware of the number of animals that are suffering in the most appalling conditions for year after year. If they fully understood the implications of such treatment the mass of our people would not accept them.

As has been said, the pig is almost certainly the most intelligent farm animal. Too many of them are subjected to horrific confinement and deprivation and can spend up to 40 weeks a year in appalling and cruel conditions. I have always believed that animals have certain basic fundamental rights, but many pigs are being denied those rights.

Let us consider, first, freedom from hunger and from poor feeding. A balanced diet is essential to give an animal sound health and vigour. Those who support the present system may say that sows have a balanced diet. However, they are not able to make the best use of that diet, because they are unable to exercise or move limbs or turn around. For a significant part of its life, a sow may be living in its own excreta. That hardly amounts to giving it basic rights.

The second issue is freedom from excessive heat and cold. People could claim that there is some form of temperature control, but I suspect that far too many farm animals are not being kept under the right conditions of heat and cold. The third issue is freedom from physical distress. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston has told the House about the tethering system, which must create enormous physical distress. It is obscene to subject an intelligent animal to that for week after week and that is totally unacceptable to any civilised nation.

The fourth issue is freedom from disease and injury. The environment should minimise the risk of infectious disease or injury and, when they occur, they should be treated effectively and quickly. It has been said that sows are treated in that way, but the conditions under which such animals are kept render it prone to all sorts of disease and injury—if not physical, certainly mental.

The fifth issue is the animal's freedom to express most of its normal behaviour. This must surely be one area in which the present system of farming is wholly unacceptable. The animal's restricted movement and its inability to be able to groom and look after itself in a natural and open way is denied. How can we say that that is acceptable? We know that the pig is a social creature. I have visited many Sussex farms and have seen pigs in natural, open surroundings thoroughly enjoying each other's company. They communicate with each other and are alive. Their life may be short, but at least it is reasonable and decent before they end up as joints on our tables. The present system denies them any real social contact.

The sixth issue is freedom from fear. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston graphically described what happens to a pig when it is first tethered. That poor animal will sometimes scream for three quarters of an hour or more before it loses its strength and settles down into appalling apathy and unconcern and probably starts to lose its normal mental balance. I have visited many pig farms in Sussex and other parts of Britain and the difference between the open system and the system that the majority of hon. Members and our people want to see abolished is colossal. If a better system is working for almost half of our pig breeders why cannot it work for the other half?

The majority of farmers treat their livestock with respect and genuinely care for, and look after, their animals. I have nothing but contempt for those greedy, unfeeling farmers who exploit animals to line their pockets with gold.

11.19 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I hope that the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) will forgive me if I do not follow him in detail; he knows that I also support the Bill.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and I have crossed swords in a variety of Committees examining Bills dealing with energy and we rarely find ourselves in agreement, but I agree very much with his comments today and do so in the knowledge that many farmers in England, as well as in Scotland, will share his views.

I had not intended to speak in the debate because my interest is with a later Bill on the Order Paper. I am keen to support that, albeit briefly, partly because it is a splendid Bill and partly because it was introduced, at my suggestion, by my close friend Donald Coleman, who died last week. I hope that the House will recognise the merits of both our former colleague and the Bill that he hoped to see through the House in his last Parliament. The Bill is aimed at protecting the red kite in Wales, and I hope that, although we may not debate it later today, the House will give it a Second Reading.

I am speaking in this debate because the European dimension has entered it. It was referred to by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) and spoken about in great detail by the hon. Member for Wentworth, who appeared to have the approval—I am sorry, I mean the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). I am the hon. Member for Wentworth. The hon.

Gentleman knows that I live in a place called Wath upon Dearne and, until recently, he lived in the village of Wentworth. I hope that he will forgive me for that error.

If the House rejects the Bill—the Minister may disagree with me as much as he likes, but I am convinced about this—there is a danger that, over the next few weeks, the Europeans will say that the British Parliament has rejected what the Minister is demanding. Although the Minister may field detailed arguments to counter that proposition, that will not work. Europe will ask how British Ministers can demand higher standards when the British Parliament, in which the Government have such a huge majority, rejected such a proposal. I urge the Minister not to encourage his hon. Friends to oppose the Bill.

Britain has a pretty good reputation in both conservation and animal welfare in Europe. At this stage, with a whole variety of issues facing Europe, for Britain to appear to be turning its back on its record would be a dangerous move. Some of the issues are important. The hon. Member for Kemptown serves with me in the Council of Europe, as does the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord). I do not think that either of them had joined at the time when we were tackling a particularly odious practice. I use it as an illustration.

Until the beginning of the 1980s, Greece had a law on horses. For quite a time, international animal welfare organisations—the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) will be aware of this—pressed for the repeal of that law and a number of us took up the cause in the Council of Europe. Under the law, it was an offence to export horses that were sound. The law had been introduced many years ago to guarantee an adequate supply of horses for the cavalry. However, the Greeks still had a considerable export trade in horses for slaughter, and people were employed on the portside to blind and maim horses so that they could be exported without exporters breaking the law.

When we were arguing about that, some people in Europe—I have to be candid and say people from southern Europe, many of whom are a great deal less sensitive than most people in northern Europe—asked me how the British could be seeking to stop them from maiming and blinding horses so that they could be sold for food when we subjected horses to steeplechasing. I am not criticising steeplechasing. I am merely pointing out that people will look carefully at us when we argue in favour of welfare or conservation. If we turn our back on the principle of the Bill, of which most hon. Members seem to approve, to support political calculations, we shall be doing the cause a profound disservice.

I am not suggesting that the House should not be sympathetic to livestock farmers, who in recent years have suffered from severe disadvantages. There is cause for grave anxiety about them. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) asked a question about the position of livestock farmers in less-favoured areas. My area is not regarded as a less-favoured one, although it is in economic terms. Even if livestock farmers throughout the country are facing real causes for anxiety, that does not justify the House voting for the retention of a system that the House must agree is callous, brutalising and no longer acceptable.

I am not a vegetarian—like many hon. Members, I am carnivorous—but I believe that we carnivores now take the view that if we are to continue to eat meat, we must insist that it is produced humanely and that the barbarity and suffering associated with the system of rearing pigs, a system which the hon. Member for Holland with Boston wishes to end, is such as to justify the Second Reading of the Bill. I hope that the House will take a kindly view of it, and will support the hon. Gentleman.

11.28 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said. I was particularly glad to hear his reference to horses, because that brings out an important aspect of the way that horse welfare has developed in Europe at a time when it is extremely important, as the House discovered only yesterday.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) said in moving his Bill, of which I am proud to be a sponsor. We heard his points with great interest because of his many years of experience as a farmer and as a pig farmer. He has seen pigs produced in a natural environment, by which I mean an open environment. That is something which, as a country boy, I have also seen. My hon. Friend has also seen sows in the confined circumstances with which the Bill deals, and so have I.

I confess that there is only one farm in my constituency, and that is a dairy farm, but most of my constituents are meat eaters and most of them take an interest in the way that meat is produced. Many people take an interest in the welfare of animals, as I know from my mail bag of recent weeks, and as my colleagues will also know.

I have two objections to the way in which pigs are reared. That is why I support the Bill. It is wrong and cruel to prevent the movement of any animal by means of collar and chain. Two or three years ago an experiment was conducted with a young calf. The collar with which it had been chained throughout its short life was removed, but the calf continued to stand against the wall where it had been chained. It did not want to move. Those who say that there is nothing cruel about chaining calves said, "Look, the calf doesn't want to move; it's perfectly happy because it's standing where it has always stood." They took no account of the fact that, from its earliest days, the calf had been conditioned to stand where it did. Any wish to move about and to be active had been driven away. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) said that by restricting the movements of an animal and confining it by means of a chain and collar we take away the mind of an animal, which is both inhumane and wrong. It is not fair, right or proper to prevent the movement, by means of collar and chain, of any animal, particularly the sow.

All too often I have seen sows chained and unable to move about. If they are lucky, they are able to stand. Sometimes, however, I have seen low bars in stalls that force sows to lie down all the time. It is unacceptable brutality, when as many as a dozen piglets can be suckling a sow, for a sow to be forced to lie down. Piglets grow fast and demand food. That leads to constant suckling to the point of soreness. The sow is unable to prevent suckling if she is forced to lie down.

Mr. John Townend: I do not believe that my hon. Friend has visited a modern pig farm. Is he aware that the Bill does not make illegal the use of farrowing crates into which sows are put just before they give birth? They remain in those crates while they are feeding the piglets. Even my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with

[Mr. John Townend]

Boston (Sir R. Body) accepts that it would be impractical to make farrowing crates illegal. Although pigs are very large animals, the piglets are very small. If the piglets were not in farrowing crates, many of them would be crushed to death by the sow rolling over them. No clause in the Bill would make farrowing crates illegal.

Mr. Greenway *rose*——

Sir Richard Body: Will my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) allow me to reply?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May we have one intervention at a time, please?

Mr. Greenway: I think that I must respond before I invite my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston to intervene. Of course I have visited pig-rearing establishments and I speak with the knowledge of what I have seen. Had I not done so, I should not have had the audacity to say what I said. I realise that it is very strong stuff.

Sir Richard Body: I am all in favour of getting rid of farrowing crates, but it would require a very high degree of stockmanship. I am very glad to say that on our farms we have that high degree of stockmanship.

Mr. Greenway: Sows continue to be tethered. They are unable to control the feeding of their piglets in the way that I have described. All animals, including cows, cats, and bitches, have to control the suckling of their young. Sometimes they walk away from their young. That may be because their teats are sore. There may be mental or many other reasons for it. We are inhumane if we take away the right of the mother to control the feeding of her young. If I were told that the piglets could starve if the mother insisted on walking away and not feeding them, my reply would be that it is up to the farmer or stockman to provide alternative methods of feeding. That can easily be done.

Large areas of farmland are not being used because of the current glut of food production. They could be turned over to free-range pig farming. Farmers are at their wits end to know which land to rest and which land to use. That must be the answer to those who say that land is not available for pigs and other animals to be reared as free-range animals.

As a small boy, throughout the last war I helped to look after a couple of pigs for my family. We called them Hitler and Himmler. They were very good to eat and we enjoyed them very much. As soon as one was killed we had another. I have a great deal of experience of pigs and know what amazing creatures they are. I taught "Animal Farm" as an O-Level set book more times than I care to remember. The writing is brilliant about the psychology of the pig. I regret that it was shown to be more intelligent than Boxer the horse. But Boxer was not a thoroughbred. The thoroughbred is not mentioned in the book. The brilliance of the mind of the pig is brought out in that remarkable book and is widely appreciated by many thousands of pupils who enjoy reading "Animal Farm".

I have seen pigs reared in fields and in pig sties. I have seen them reared most happily in sheds. If pigs are reared in sheds and are given a reasonable amount of space in which to roam they have a most happy environment. I hope that the Bill will lead to the pig population enjoying again those living conditions on a 100 per cent. rather than a 50 per cent. basis.

11.37 am

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on introducing the Bill. It carries great weight, because he is a distinguished farmer.

I am proud to be a sponsor of the Bill. I am also proud to be a member of Compassion in World Farming. I am not a vegetarian, but I eat less and less meat as I learn more about the treatment of farm animals. I cannot justify the way in which they are treated. I suspect that the more the public find out about it the less meat they will consume. The only way to justify it is not to talk about it. That has happened for far too long. However, because of the work done by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston and others, this is becoming an important issue in political life.

However, the Bill is only the first step. Many other farm animals, particularly poultry and cattle, are treated inhumanely. All hon. Members must be aware that the public are showing a growing revulsion against the inhumane treatment of farm animals. We are all responsible, not just farmers. I am glad that many farmers do not treat their farm animals inhumanely. The consumer, however, has a very big responsibility. Those of us who eat meat ought to take an interest in how it is produced. The more people find out about that, the more things will change.

It is about time that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food caught up with the growing public mood on this extremely important issue and took the matter seriously. I suspect that I shall find the Minister's speech depressing. No doubt, he will express sympathy with the Bill's aims but not with the details. I am delighted to say that the Labour party is taking the issue seriously. "Farming Without Cruelty", which will form part of our programme at the next election, outlines a range of measures that apply to the welfare not just of pigs but of animals generally, particularly farm animals. I shall be pleased to support that document and shall make it part of my election programme, even though I represent a constituency which, like that of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), has probably only one farm in it. Many of my urban constituents and I feel strongly about this subject.

This is only the first step. Changing the culture in which farm animals are reared may be a long political battle. If the day dawns when I am fortunate in having my name drawn high in the ballot for private Members' Bills, I too will raise some aspects of farm animal welfare. My constituents and I feel strongly about this and we want a change for the better.

11.41 am

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I shall not speak for long because many colleagues want to participate in the debate. I hope that the House will forgive me if I leave a little later because I must go to Devon for another meeting with farmers.

I am glad that I have been called to speak in this debate because the welfare of animals must be interwoven with our thinking as civilised human beings. I support the Farm Animal Welfare Council's proposal to phase out these

unhappy arrangements for breeding pigs, although I do not regard the council as the architect of all perfect thinking. It was a great pity that the council misunderstood my Bill on deer slaughtering and opposed it. It would have brought about better controls in slaughterhouses where there had been no controls before. I am glad that subsequently, despite the council's opposition and misunderstanding, the Government managed to introduce suitable regulations, which are now in place and which will be backed by further regulations in response to my parliamentary question last week about other animal species in slaughterhouses. I bow to the compassion that the FAWC shows throughout its work for animal welfare, although it is not always accurate or correct.

I have the highest regard for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and particularly its deputy chief veterinary officer, Alistair Mews. I have carefully read the material that Mr. Mews and his organisers sent me. I have had extensive briefings from the National Farmers Union. My constituency includes the deputy chairman of the county of Devon branch of the NFU, Brian Jennings; the vice-chairman, Graham England; the chairman of the pig committee, Mr. Brian Jones—who, for the purposes of the debate, lives in the wrong place, the village of Sheepwash, but is a pig expert—and London delegate Ray Martin, from Tavistock, who is involved in milk production in the area that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) knows so well.

In the latest issue of "Farm-House" sent to me and other supporters of its members' great work, the south-west branch of the NFU describes the Bill as a

"Body Blow to Pig Farmers".

That headline is misleading, although it is delightful and a nice play on words. It pays tribute to the far-sighted integrity of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston in continually lobbying for the best conditions for pigs. None the less, pig farmers have misunderstood. This is not a body blow to pig farmers.

From talking to pig farmers in my constituency and in the NFU, I know that they share a proper concern for the welfare of the animals in their charge. That is why I strongly refute the easy route that the Bill's sponsor has chosen in criticising what he damningly calls large-scale commercial pig farming. These people operate with the highest ethics and work extremely hard to provide consumers with cheap, healthy pigmeat at the lowest possible price. It is worth remembering that, although some consumers are prepared to pay an on-cost of 25 per cent. for specially produced meat, many people cannot afford that cost. We should pay tribute to pig farmers—whether large commercial or small but also commercial pig farmers—who have produced such excellent clean, green and healthy pigmeat for us over many years.

One hon. Member derided the product and talked about "green, clean and healthy" production as though only organic pig farming would produce such qualities. Other hon. Members have been somewhat anthropomorphic in attempting to identify in pigs behavioural patterns, intellectual capability and emotions that are derived from their behavioural patterns as human beings and are not attributable to pigs.

I shall deal first with a green, clean and healthy aspect. Pigs are notorious for picking up diseases and infections. As those of us who have travelled widely know, it is easy for pigmeat to carry such infections, some of which are serious for human beings. It is a credit to our pig producers that we have green, clean and healthy pigmeat, even though the way in which some of it is produced is not, according to current perception, the best possible way to let pigs lead a comfortable life before being killed.

On anthropomorphism, I remind the House that pig behaviour patterns differ from ours. Human mothers do not, unlike pigs, eat their young for almost no reason. When I was small, we were involved with pig farming. We had a farm throughout my childhood and adolescence and most of my twenties. They were kept comfortably and, in human terms, happily in pig sties, not the stalls about which we are talking.

The difficulty is that pigs eat or lie on their young. As other hon. Members pointed out, they behave in what in human terms would be described as a selfish way, by muscling in, taking all the food and not leaving any. We all want every person in charge of animals—whether cats, budgerigars, dogs or pigs—to treat those animals in a way that is consistent with the highest ethics that civilisation demands. None the less, let us not give pigs attributes that they do not possess.

The Government's perspective should be given the credit that it deserves and the recent ministerial statement should be recognised as a major breakthrough. The Government and the Bill's sponsors should accept the major problems involved with phasing out pig stalls too rapidly, because there is no suitable alternative. Do they agree that the Government should give more assistance through research? We could offer pig farmers a possible way forward which would restrict the less attractive human attributes that are so detrimental in pig breeding programmes but would not inhibit their normal behavioural patterns.

It is wrong that British pig farmers should be subjected to a change that will not affect European producers. I strenuously believe that change will come and I am delighted with the Minister's statement, but we should spend much time and effort trying to persuade our major competitors—Denmark, west Germany and the Netherlands—that they must make the same changes. That is an important factor, otherwise we shall face similar problems as we now do with crated veal. We took right and proper steps, but others did not follow. Therefore, our calves, raised in the United Kingdom, are then reared further in other European countries under the methods that we discarded. Those calves are then sold back to us, so all that has happened is that we eat the veal but the profit has gone to different European farmers.

If the Bill goes through, it is important that Northern Ireland is not exempt. It is an exemption that I cannot justify; it is strange and incomprehensible. If the Bill proceeds, Northern Ireland should be included.

11.50 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) has done the House and the cause of animal welfare a great service by introducing the Bill. Many of our constituents believe that this is a crucial subject. I also warmly welcome the Minister's announcement to the effect that new installations will be banned and that existing dry sow stalls and tethers will be phased out.

[Mr. Gary Waller]

It must be accepted by all sensible people that pigs are intelligent animals. In a recent editorial, *The Times* described them as "civilised". Pigs are bound to be stressed if they are kept in stalls for four months where they are unable to exercise or to turn around. The pig producers that I have met are content that the dry sow stalls should be phased out, but in a way that enables them to convert to a more acceptable system within a reasonable timescale.

There has been some debate about relative costs and profits. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said that some farmers are changing their methods for commercial reasons, which is interesting. Pig farming is not a significant activity in my constituency, but at the weekend, in the knowledge that the Bill would receive its Second Reading today, I had the opportunity to visit two pig units in Yorkshire. They are run by the same company and are well managed. It operates intensive units with sow stalls and has straw yards in which the animals are loose-housed. The total number of animals kept runs into four figures.

The performance of the units is continually monitored on computer and it is possible to compare such indicators as the number of pigs produced per year, the percentage of piglet deaths and the cost per pig reared. In the dry sow stall units, 4·2 per cent. of the piglets died, while in the straw yard system the figure was somewhat higher, at 11·8 per cent. Neither figure is dramatically high, but it is only fair to say that there is a higher rate of loss in the straw yards. Sows kept in the stalls produced 23·3 piglets per year while loose-housed pigs produced 19·4 on average In the best conditions, it is clear that there is a differential in the rate of breeding due to suffocation, bullying and abortion. The figures produced at the two production units also showed that the cost per pig reared is £9·94 for those kept in straw yards and £8·22 for sows kept in the sow stalls in the intensive unit.

Despite some of the claims to the contrary, the cost of rearing in straw yards can be about 15 per cent. more than the cost of rearing in intensive units in sow stalls, where both units are managed to the best standards. That is an important factor.

Converting to straw yards is not prohibitively expensive, but the relatively small difference in cost is enough to make some production units in Britain potentially uncompetitive compared with their continental counterparts unless the latter are also required to make the same changes.

In the Netherlands and Denmark, a higher proportion of pigs are reared in intensive units. Therefore, the effect of a change on our part without a commensurate change overseas would be an increase in imported bacon and other pig products, probably resulting in a contraction of our industry. There would be no overall benefit for the animals as a whole if the size of the market continued as before.

The units that I visited were, as I said, extremely well managed and I saw no signs of distress in any of the animals. It was explained to me that the conditions were good because pigs cannot thrive if kept in poor conditions. It is not only good animal welfare practice, but sound economics that causes responsible pig producers to look after their animals well. Indeed, the animals that I saw have a diet of broadcast music, and I understand that they prefer Radio 2 to Radio 1.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: So they are intelligent animals.

Mr. Waller: I do not dissent from that.

Yesterday the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the pressure group, Compassion in World Farming, helpfully showed some hon. Members a film of a pig production unit at the opposite end of the scale to the ones I visited. Frankly, the conditions were abominable, and it was clear that the animals were suffering neglect on the part of whoever was responsible for their welfare. Apparently, that person visited the unit only irregularly and it was left unattended for the rest of the time. The place was filthy and decrepit. It was not only obvious that there was a high death rate among the piglets, but some dead piglets had been left lying around for some time. There was every justification for shutting the place immediately and prosecuting the people responsible.

The film depicted the conditions in an intensive unit using dry sow stalls, but I am sure that there are badly kept units that use the free-range or straw yard system. The film was not in itself an indictment of the dry sow stall system, but it showed that some people should not be allowed anywhere near animals and that they do untold damage to the image of the industry.

Given the choice, I do not doubt that a well-managed intensive unit in which the pigs are kept dry, warm and well fed is preferable to another system in which the pigs are cold, wet and hungry. That does not justify, of course, continuing the dry sow stall system. I support its abolition and I believe that satisfactory alternatives already exist. It is vital, however, for a persistent and unrelenting effort to be made for a European-wide ban in the interests of animal welfare and the survival of United Kingdom pig breeders.

I am far from an advocate of widespread harmonisation in the European Community for its own sake, but if it is justified in any area, it must be justified for pig production. We must ensure that those who are less scrupulous about the welfare of their animals cannot gain an economic advantage.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has gone further than the provisions of the Bill in one respect by introducing a ban on new installations. I hope that the Bill will get a Second Reading to show that we are set firmly on the course of abolition. The Bill should be amended in Committee, however, to ensure the commercial survival of responsible pig producers who genuinely want to meet the standards that consumers, rightly, increasingly want.

11.58 am

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on his success in the ballot and I thank him for choosing such an important subject. Anyone who has any doubts about the Bill should study my hon. Friend's excellent and informative speech, which brought home to us the cruelty of the system that we seek to change.

It is often said that we are a nation of animal lovers, but I doubt whether that is true. There are far too many horrendous examples of cruelty to animals, and I am not really surprised. Last year, the House agreed to extend

until the time of birth the permitted period for killing unborn children by abortion, which is often carried out in a violent and painful way, and almost invariably for social reasons. If we can do that to our own kind, it is scarcely surprising that we show even less respect for animals and treat them, too, in a cruel and violent way.

Our attitude to animals begins to be formed when we are young children. It is characterised by a great contradiction in what we say and what we do. Young children are encouraged to love cuddly rabbits and dogs and go to bed with a teddy bear. Thus, some animals are the objects of love. On the other hand, children's bedtime stories tell of the big bad wolf, which is depicted as a granny-eating animal with transvestite tendencies. In the nursery rhyme, there is general rejoicing that three blind mice have their tails cut off with a carving knife. No wonder the cow jumped over the moon. Is it surprising that when young people grow up, their attitude towards the treatment of animals is at best ambivalent and there are so many examples of cruelty because people do not care about animals or respect their rights?

It is also little wonder that in 1821, when Richard Martin sought to introduce legislation to prevent the ill-treatment of horses, the House fell about laughing. The laughter was redoubled when the 1821 equivalent of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggested that the legislation should also be extended to asses or even to dogs and cats. Thankfully, we have come a long way since then, and it is to be hoped that hon. Members' attitudes to animals is more enlightened. However, we still have a long way to go before we can call ourselves a civilised nation in the context of the way in which we treat animals. The Bill seeks to take us a step further along that road and I am happy to support it. I am not a vegetarian—although I probably would be if I had to kill the animals that I eat—but I feel strongly that even animals which are eventually eaten should be treated in a humane manner.

In seeking to end the use of neck and girth tethers for breeding sows and to prohibit the confinement of breeding sows in narrow stalls, the Bill seeks to improve the awful conditions in which pigs are often kept. I welcome the Minister's announcement that the Government are to ban the use of narrow breeding stalls and neck and girth tethers in all new installations once Parliament has approved the regulations.

In supporting the Bill, I have one concern to which hon. Members have referred, and which is set out well in a letter that I received from the north-west region of the National Farmers Union. The letter was written—appropriately or inappropriately, I am not sure which—by Mr. R. J. Bacon, the senior policy advisor. Mr. Bacon writes:

"To require those United Kingdom pig breeders who still use stalls and tethers to abandon this practice and invest in alternative systems within 5 years would be harsh to say the least. Some 30 per cent. of our pigmeat products are supplied from abroad . . . and there is no intention to ban imports from countries using similar stall and tether systems.

NFU believes that welfare standards for pigs, as for all farm livestock, should be applied equally throughout the European Community. We would therefore urge you to press for an EC wide agreement on pig welfare standards when this Bill comes before the House."

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston answered that valid point. Unless we seek to extend such provisions to Europe, we may simply transfer the suffering of pigs from our country to Europe. We could so easily damage our own suppliers without any gain in terms of animal welfare. That would be tragic, not least for the pigs, so I hope that, in tandem with the Bill, we will do all that we can to improve conditions for pigs in the Community.

By giving the Bill its Second Reading today, we shall enable ourselves to argue with greater strength for such a change in Europe. As the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) said, if we do not support the Bill, we shall be in a poor position to argue for change in Europe. I hope that the House will support the Bill, not only for that reason but because it represents a more enlightened attitude to the treatment of animals generally.

12.5 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on his success in the ballot and on using it for such an important Bill. I hope that the House will forgive me if I say that it is a kosher measure. Only this week, following my vote against war in the Gulf, one of the tabloid papers described me as a treacherous swine, because I voted to save our soldiers' bacon. Perhaps my remarks on the pig Bill will carry more credence as a result.

I have still better credentials. I held an exhibition in the House on behalf of that excellent organisation Compassion in World Farming, which strongly supports the Bill. That exhibition brought to hon. Members' attention the immense cruelty involved in dry sow stalls and called for the abolition of the system. I remember that there was a papier maché pig on display. One day, unbeknown to me, the organisation brought in a real pig for publicity purposes. I received an urgent phone call saying, "What shall we do with the pig?" Thinking that it was a papier maché pig, I said, "Let it in," causing chaos at the front entrance. Luckily, out came the then Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) who handled the pig excellently and was very sympathetic on the issue. I pay credit to him for that.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is a butcher.

Mr. Cohen: He may be a butcher but he handled the pig with great care on that occasion. I only wish that the present Ministers would take a similarly sympathetic attitude, because we were beginning to be on the way to getting the system abolished.

I raised the matter during a debate on the Finance Bill.

Mr. John Townend: I appreciate the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's views and I know that he has seen demonstrations. But has he visited one of the large, highly efficient pig units at which the farmers are very conscious of animal welfare and where the pigs are well looked after? Is he basing his argument purely on photographs and articles or has he been to see some of the most efficient producers in the country?

Mr. Cohen: No, I have not seen the big farms, but I have seen the dry sow stall. It was a key part of the exhibition that I sponsored. Anyone could see that here was an instrument which inflicted grave cruelty on the pregnant sow. The same is true of the tether. I brought a tether into the Palace and showed it to the Finance Bill Committee when I was trying to get the tether abolished.

The practice is incredibly cruel because the sow is kept in very close confinement for the duration of her sixteen-and-a-half week pregnancy and perhaps for

[Mr. Cohen]

pregnancy after pregnancy. The sows are tethered to a concrete floor by a heavy chain attached either to a girth or to a metal neck collar. There is no room for any kind of movement. That is a very cruel process. Both the sow stalls and the tethers should be phased out. Many welfare organisations and official bodies have condemned tethers on welfare grounds.

As long ago as 1981 the Select Committee on Agriculture stated that the practice was cruel. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food welfare code for pigs produced in 1983 admitted that close confinement

"places severe restrictions on the animals' freedom of movement, denies them normal exercise, can give rise to patterns of abnormal behaviour and very commonly causes injury and leg weakness."

The European Parliament voted against the practice in 1987 and again as recently as last year.

In 1988 the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended that:

"The government should introduce legislation as a matter of urgency to prevent all further installation of units of these designs."

In 1989 the Government responded to the FAWC assessment and stated:

"the keeping of sows in stalls, with or without tethers, imposes an undesirable welfare burden on the animals."

The evidence from the official bodies is conclusive. The practice is cruel.

Alternatives are available, and half of Britain's sows are now being kept successfully in different systems such as indoor loose housing systems or free range out in the fields. There has been no economic disadvantage for pig farmers who use those systems.

The Bill could be policed easily, because MAFF already employs divisional veterinary officers who make welfare visits to farms and could easily check.

I am pleased that the Labour party has come to grips with the issue. There are two Labour proposals that are relevant to and support the Bill. First, Labour will prohibit the installation of new sow stall and tether accommodation, set a strict timetable for the phasing out of existing systems and require the provision of dry bedding. That is an excellent proposal and I hope to be a Back Bencher voting for the implementation of such a proposal under a Labour Government. The second proposal is that Labour will require the provision of bedding to growing pigs and prohibit the rearing of pigs in sweat boxes and multi-tier pens. I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) for introducing those proposals into Labour party policy. The Government had better accept them quickly.

Reference has been made to the Common Market and the Government claim that they cannot implement such a policy unilaterally because EC rules state that we must move through harmonisation. That is not the case. The United Kingdom acted unilaterally when we banned cruel veal calf crates because in that respect we viewed the issue of cruelty differently from the rest of Europe. That has set a precedent for us to act on this occasion.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): What effect did that ban on veal have on the comparative competition between veal farmers in this country and those on the continent?

Mr. Cohen: I am not an expert in that area, but I have not heard that it has affected British farmers adversely. I am sure that if it had, with the farming lobby in this country able to make a big fuss, we would have heard about it. It is right that the United Kingdom should make a stand on issues where cruelty is involved and then try to spread that policy throughout Europe.

In 1989 the European Commission published a proposed regulation for the minimum standards for the protection of pigs. I am concerned that the latest version of the proposal does not prohibit sow stalls or tethers. It is likely that it will be several years before even that inadequate legislation will be in place. There is nothing to stop individual states in the Common Market setting minimum standards that may be more stringent than the 1989 EC regulation when it becomes a directive. If that is the case, we could act now. The Government are using the European dimension as an excuse for not acting at the moment. We should have a Europe-wide ban on sow stalls and tethers, but that should be in addition to action that we take in this country. There should not be a requirement that we should do nothing until there is a Europe-wide ban.

There are many areas in which we do not have harmonisation with the rest of Europe. For example, we are not in harmony with the rest of Europe in respect of the war in the Gulf. Similarly, there is no harmonisation in respect of taxation or European monetary union. It is perfectly proper, especially on principled matters of animal cruelty, that we should act in advance of Europe and spread the issues to Europe.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Obviously we are concerned about cruelty to animals. However, the real cruelty is the cruelty to humans. We are all aware of the Gulf crisis. We are also aware of how some people suffer in this country and of how some live in cardboard boxes. It is right to consider pigs, but we must consider the human animal above all else. That is clearly a political issue. The Government do not think about such issues. The only thing that they think is important is profit. That is all they think about and that is a tragedy.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In responding to that intervention, I hope that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will address the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: Yes, indeed. I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) said. Our votes against the Gulf war were principled votes to stop the enormous loss of life there. There is a connection between cruelty to animals and cruelty between human beings, and it is consistent to try to stop both forms of cruelty.

The Bill allows five years for the phasing out of those cruel practices. When I first read the Bill, I thought that that was too long. However, at least that allows plenty of time for the practice to be ended, especially as the argument has been going on for so long. The argument has been won. The practice is cruel, and it should be ended. I support the Bill and I wish it every success.

12.19 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on introducing the Bill. I have

no doubt that the practices that are used to keep pigs are cruel. That was the main reason why, two years ago, I decided no longer to eat meat. Those cruel methods and the descriptions of them that are freely available for people to see have driven several people to reach the same decision. I mention that point to explain my position. I do not seek to persuade anybody else to take a decision or to change their own way of life. It was my decision. Therefore, I applaud and am sympathetic to the arguments that have been made by my constituents.

Some of the practices that are used when pigs are kept in intensive systems have aroused concern for some time. In March 1988, the Farm Animal Welfare Council published an assessment of pig production systems which examined in some detail, among other things, the stall and tether systems for keeping dry sows.

In stall systems, the sows are kept in temperature-controlled buildings, in individual pens that are closed on all sides and in which they cannot turn around. Bedding is not normally provided in such stalls, as we have heard.

In tether systems, sows are again kept in temperature-controlled buildings and are restrained by tethers around the neck or girth. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston for showing hon. Members such a tether. Unless one sees the outrageous nature of the piece of chain with its plastic cover, one has no idea of just how cruel it can be. The tether is extremely heavy. The full horror of that device was not entirely conveyed when my hon. Friend explained it on the radio this morning. Nevertheless, anyone who has seen such a tether device must understand that it should be banned as quickly as possible.

Mr. John Townend: I agree with my hon. Friend's remarks about the tether. However, does he think that it should be banned completely? I noticed that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) proposes to ban it only in a dry sow unit and not for tethering outside. If it is cruel to tether a pig in that way, is not it cruel to do so whatever the situation?

Mr. Hughes: If my hon. Friend is asking for my view, yes, of course. Anyone who has read descriptions about pigs knows that they are not only intelligent but sensitive animals. There is legendary evidence of pigs knowing that they are going to the slaughter, and crying. There have been some long and, no doubt, accurate descriptions in some of the literature that I have read about the sensitivity of pigs—for example, the way in which they form friendships and can understand what is going on around them. The answer to my hon. Friend's intervention is yes. However, we are not dealing with Bill to deal with the issue that he raised. Perhaps some hon. Members may wish to amend the Bill in Committee, and perhaps the Government may examine that matter as they have done in the past, My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Tether systems were originally evolved at least partly to prevent the bullying and fighting that often occur, especially at feeding time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) has graphically explained. FAWC considered that both systems failed to meet certain welfare criteria to which particular importance was attached. The 1983 version of the code of welfare for pigs stated that keeping sows and gilts in stalls, whether with or without tethers, raised serious welfare problems.

I have several problems with the Bill, which I shall try to explain. The first relates to the role and relevance of the European Community. I am rather perplexed. I do not want us to end up in the situation in which we found ourselves with a piece of fisheries legislation that had taken up a great deal of legislative time, only to be told by the European Commission that we could not sustain that legislation. Of course, we had to pass legislation repealing that fisheries legislation. If that were to happen again, it would not be helpful to anyone—certainly not to pigs.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would explain precisely the situation with the European Community. Do we have full entitlement to pass this legislation? What will be the situation with the regulations that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has promised? The Government have generally supported the introduction of European Community standards on animal welfare. They have an extremely good record in this and other animal welfare matters and in trying to push the European Community for higher standards. The Government have supported the introduction of EC standards on animal welfare, saying that the FAWC report and its recommendations most of which, of course, they accepted should be used as a basis for negotiations and that they would use them as a basis for negotiations when the EC proposals appear.

On 27 July 1989 the European Community published proposals for the welfare of pigs and calves. The proposals for pigs—EC draft 7654/89—were wide ranging and included a provision that sows should not be tethered for four weeks after weaning and that, if individually stalled during that period, they must be let out for daily exercise. The draft did not suggest a general ban on dry sow stalls, while tethers would be banned only from 1999, and the use of stalls generally permitted if one hour's exercise a day was given.

The proposals on calves and pigs were debated by the Second Standing Committee on European Community Documents on 8 November 1989. My hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, said that the Government thought that both sets of proposals were inadequate and would seek modification to them. The European Parliament subsequently sought various changes to the proposals, some of which the Commission accepted. However, the proposals did not cover the FAWC recommendations on sow stalls and tethers. The revised proposals were originally to have been considered at the Agriculture Council meeting last September. But there has been a good deal of slippage and at present there is no firm date for their discussion. Again, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will cover that in his remarks to give us some idea of when the Government believe that the European Community will get round to discussing these matters.

In a press notice issued on 10 January 1991, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that discussions in the European Community were proceeding and that the Government were still committed to securing Community agreement along the lines of the FAWC recommendations at the earliest date. He said:

"In the last two months a Commission-sponsored seminar attended by welfare and farming bodies from Europe

[Mr. Hughes]

concluded that alternative systems for sows had been developed to the stage where they can safely replace stalls and tether systems. These conclusions will give a major impetus to the development of the necessary Community rules."

That was an extremely welcome statement from my right hon. Friend. I would put it this way. The preconditions suggested by the FAWC for banning stalls and tethers have been met.

There is, of course, a difference between the recommendations of my right hon. Friend and the details of the Bill. I received a letter and a briefing paper from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In my short time in the House I have listened to various debates on dogs and the RSPCA has mounted campaigns about dogs. I never thought that I would praise in the House a document that I had received from the RSPCA. However, on this matter, unlike in the debates on dogs, the RSPCA has been extremely responsible.

The letter from Jerry Lloyd, the parliamentary liaison officer for the RSPCA, is extremly well written. More to the point, it is fair. It points out fairly where the debate is centred. The letter makes two points. I should be interested to hear the response of my hon. Friend the Minister on those points. The first concerns the Ministry's intention to ban new installations from this year. The RSPCA applauds that addition to the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said, it has been clear to any sensible pig farmer for some time that it would not be wise to install a new system—and scarely any have been introduced over the past three years. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston will accept that improvement in Committee, and it was very fair of the RSPCA to describe that development in the way that it did.

The second point is more perplexing. I refer to the time difference in the phasing-out period allowed in the Bill, that indicated in the statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister, and that suggested by the National Farmers Union. The difference is marginal.

How much difference will it make in reality if the phasing-out period differs? Knowing that the system is to be phased out anyway, would not pig farmers react and change their operations, to achieve compliance on more or less the same date?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My constituency, perhaps in common with that of my hon. Friend, contains no pig farmers—and because of the nature of my constituency, it probably does not contain many dead pigs either. Nevertheless, many of my constituents have written to me to express their concern and interest in the Bill. My inclination is to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) that the practice in question is outrageously cruel and ought to be stopped as soon as possible. My concern is the difference between the action that would be taken in this country and on the European continent. If we take action that others do not, we might put our pig farmers out of business simply to achieve the marginal difference of which my hon. Friend speaks.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend's latter observation is absolutely right. If we care about the welfare of these sensitive and intelligent animals, and if that is the reason for the Bill, we should be concerned not only about English pigs but all the pigs in the European Community. Our main thrust should be to achieve improvements throughout the Community for reasons of animal welfare, but also because it would be unreasonable to put United Kingdom pig farmers at an unreasonable disadvantage. However, my hon. Friend made one incorrect remark at the beginning of his intervention, because there is one pig farmer in my constituency. However, I am pleased to say that he does not use the methods of which so many of us disapprove.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if the Bill receives a Second Reading, the question of timing can be dealt with in Committee? I remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1982-83, the Government told this country's milk producers to change their policy overnight. The Government did not give them an hour's notice of the unfavourable quota system.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): That measure was imposed by the European Community.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend the Minister rightly points out that that decision was taken by the European Community and that the Government had no option but to implement it. The Liberals like to suggest that they are the only people who believe in the Community, so it ill becomes them to suggest that we should not comply with its directives. As to the hon. Gentleman's first point, I have no doubt that the timing aspect will be examined in Committee. If it reaches the conclusion that the period suggested by my hon. Friend the Minister is right, why is there a need for the Bill in the first place? Would not we do better to follow the regulations?

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): As a Member whose constituency contains not only pig farmers but a population who are very concerned about the welfare of pigs, I ask my hon. Friend whether he agrees that, by destroying or making very difficult the viability of our own pig producers, we shall be letting into the country, by way of substitution, pigmeat that has been produced in a far more inhumane way than any method currently used in Britain? Would not that make a total nonsense of the Bill?

Mr. Hughes: One of the drawbacks of giving way to my hon. and learned Friend is that he puts arguments in a way that I wish I had done. It would be an absolute nonsense if we were to cripple the activities of our own pig farmers, merely to see their products replaced by those of others who are using the methods that we deplore. We must have that very much in our minds before passing legislation that would have the effects described by my hon. Friends on the pig farmers in their constituencies.

Mr. Arbuthnot: One of the topics on which my constituents have also written to me is the transport of live animals. The transportation from the continent to this country of live animals might increase if the proposed legislation is introduced.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically interesting point, and it is one worthy of research. It should be possible to find out from farmers who produce pigs or other livestock what they would do if confronted with the situation that has been described. If my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) is proved right, we would have to consider

whether we are doing the right thing. However, there is not that much between the two sides to the argument. No one suggests that tethering under stalls is anything but a cruel practice.

Therefore, I shall finish where I started, and warmly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Holland and Boston for bringing this matter to everyone's attention and for producing the Bill. I hope that the Bill will get into Committee so that the important matters that have been discussed can be further aired during the Committee's deliberations and we can decide whether we are better off with the regulations than we are with the Bill.

I shall add one further point to my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Holland and Boston. The reality of government is that without some pressure, and without the Bill—I do not refer to pressure from lobbying groups but from my hon. Friend and the admirable campaign that he has put together which has culminated in the Bill—I suspect that, at the very least, it might have taken more time to introduce such regulations. The fact that my hon. Friend has been able to campaign, and that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have responded in the manner that they have, shows that pressure from hon. Members, especially when they are as well informed as my hon. Friend, pays off. That is the way to bring about changes in these important matters.

I welcome the debate and the fact that, one way or another, these cruel practices will be ended. I hope that this is just the start, and that we will begin to consider the enormous cruelties that we impose upon animals in the name of our way of life in this country, and I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the Bill.

12.40 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Second Reading of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) has done a signal service to the country and to the House by choosing this subject for his Bill. There can be few hon. Members who can speak on the subject of pig breeding with more experience than my hon. Friend.

I have had to study the Bill carefully. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who I see in the Chamber and who represents a constituency similar to mine, I have had to consider this issue from the point of view of a Member of Parliament representing a Humberside constituency which probably contains more pigs than humans. It is probably true to say that, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington, I represent more pigs than constituents. Therefore, hon. Members will understand that I have been lobbied by the pig industry on this issue, if not, unfortunately, by the pigs.

I could have made an easy judgment, on the basis that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) arrived at his conclusions, because there is a large pig industry in my constituency which is an important employer. One would think that, as a result, I ought to be suspicious of the Bill. However, the more that the pig breeders have lobbied him on the issue, and the more that I have studied it, the more convinced I have become that my hon. Friend's Bill is necessary. Of course, I have also received representations from other constituents about farm welfare as it is affected by the Bill. Therefore, I have arrived at a very different judgment from that of my hon. Friends the Members for Bridlington and for Richmond, Yorks. It is unusual for me to be in this situation. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington represent constituencies which are in the same county—north and south Humberside—and which contain a large pig breeding industry. I cannot think of any occasion in the past when my hon. Friend and I have not been on the same side. Perhaps this issue underlines the differences between attitudes on the north and the south banks of the River Humber, and accounts for the reason why the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is seeking a case for the transfer of my constituency to Lincolnshire. Although we both have many pig breeders in our constituencies, we have different views on this subject.

Mr. John Townend: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that I entirely agree with his idea of his constituency rejoining Lincolnshire. For myself, I should like to see the restoration of East Yorkshire.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support, but I want now to concentrate on the Bill.

I congratulate the Government on their response to the Bill. It is a classic example of the success that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston has achieved even before uttering the words, "I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time." My hon. Friend was successful in gaining second place in the ballot. It is no coincidence that since then, just two days ago, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issued a press release in the name of my right hon. Friend the Minister stating that

"consultation is now to begin on a pig stall and tether ban. The Government issued today"—

on Wednesday, two days before this debate—

"a consultation document which provides details of proposals to ban stall and tether systems for all pigs. Agriculture Minister John Gummer announced on 10th January that the Government intends to ban new installations and to phase out existing systems by 31st December 1998."

So the only point at issue between the Government and my hon. Friend is one of timing. Everything that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has said publicly shows that his attitude is exactly the same as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston, who has thus encouraged the Ministry to accept the principle of the Bill and to come forward with its own proposals.

My hon. Friend wants to phase out in five years this dreadful way of rearing pigs, but the Government have conceded his point already, so it might be argued that the Bill is unnecessary because the Government intend to phase out the system over eight years—there is a difference of only three years between the two proposals. Nevertheless, I have come to the view that we should allow the Bill to go into Committee if only so that other points such as those raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) can be discussed; and we might want to extend the Bill to include one or two other aspects of pig breeding.

The evidence in support of the Bill is overwhelming at every point of reference. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston quoted from a report by the Select Committee on Agriculture, issued in 1980-81. He was a member of that Committee and, as I speak for and on behalf of pigs today, I must remind the House that I am the parliamentary private secretary to my hon. and learned

[Mr. Brown]

Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), who was also a distinguished member of that Committee—and I am a defender of all hogs, human or four-legged.

The Select Committee categorically recommended that every effort be made

"to develop the alternative small group system and any other which looks promising as quickly as possible to the point where, whilst maintaining its welfare advantages, it is established as practicable and economically competitive. As soon as this point is in sight notice should be given that close confinement will be phased out over a reasonable but defined period, and the tether and stall and tied stall method be abolished."

I have already quoted the following evidence in an earlier intervention this morning. It is the definitive work on this issue——

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I notice that my hon. Friend is repeating what he has already said this morning. We have been discussing this important Bill for more than three hours. The House has a long agenda before it, and there is great interest inside and outside the House in the Domestic Smoke Alarms Bill. Therefore, I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I must inform the hon. Gentleman that, although I understand his frustration, it is my role in this Chamber to safeguard the business before us and to see that Members who are still rising and who wish to participate in the debate are allowed to do so. I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's motion at this time.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I support the Bill, and I am an RSPCA activist and a vegetarian. I am also a sponsor of the Domestic Smoke Alarms Bill, which is about saving the lives of 700 children a year. I am concerned that attempts are being made by way of a filibuster to wreck the opportunity to debate proposed legislation that could save the lives of many people in the United Kingdom. I hope that we shall bear that in mind and that at some stage an opportunity for debate will be provided for those who support not only the Pig Husbandry Bill but the Domestic Smoke Alarms Bill. We must not lose the opportunity to alleviate the misery of pigs, but we must also take steps to save the lives of 700 people who die needlessly each year.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, but I shall see to it that there is no tedious repetition.

Mr. Brown: But for those two interventions, I might have resumed my seat. In an intervention earlier, I did not speak about the Select Committee on Agriculture. I spoke about the notes for guidance which were issued in 1983 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) may not have realised that the first time that I mentioned the Select Committee report was a few moments ago.

In 1983 the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), said in his guidance notes to pig breeders that sows should not be kept under the system that the Bill seeks to phase out. Alternative systems such as kennels, straw yards or yards and cubicles will more fully meet animals' behavioural and exercise needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for York will note that I did not draw attention to the latest work on this matter which was issued by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in February 1988. Studies on the whole issue go back a decade and the only question to be answered is about the timing. The other matter to be addressed is the attitude of our European competitors.

I intervened during the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks to say that there is no point in the House—this body of all bodies—saying that until Europe makes a move we should not do anything. As I have said, we could lead by example and put before the European Commission a proposal for the rest of the Community. We could say that we have passed legislation on the issue and could use our example in making the case for similar legislation throughout the Community.

It would be wrong for us to say that we will not put right an injustice, whether it is in relation to animal welfare or about minorities. It would also be wrong to say that future injustices will not be put right until we have first ascertained that the lowest common denominator has been reached in the European Community. It is important to establish that matter of principle.

I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston on his Bill. I have had to agonise over my decision. If I had to decide on the basis of immediate short-term interests, I suppose that I would take the narrow view because there are many pig farmers in my constituency. That would lead me automatically to vote in their favour and against the Bill. However, I shall not do that. If there is a Division, I shall vote in favour of the Bill because the clear indication from pig breeders is that they are voluntarily moving away from the present system. That is quite right.

12.54 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I applaud the view taken by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on the European dimension, and share that view. I congratulate the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on his good fortune in coming second in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on his good judgment in introducing a measure which will command support from both sides of the House, despite some of the speeches that we have heard. I confirm the whole-hearted support of the Labour party for the Bill, which will improve the conditions under which breeding sows are kept.

The hon. Gentleman is well known for his concern about, and advocacy of improvement in, animal welfare. He is well-respected both inside and outside Parliament for his independence of spirit and the determination that he has consistently shown in promoting his cause.

The Bill is supported outside the House by many people who have been vigorous in their attempts to ensure that their representatives know of their concern and are present to give the Bill a well-deserved Second Reading. They have been the foot soldiers of the admirable professional organisations that have been supporting the Bill. I pay tribute to the necessary and valuable work that they do. The RSPCA, with which we are all familiar, supports the Bill, but it is principally the creation of Compassion in

World Farming. That is a lesser-known, but no less worthy, organisation and it must take much of the credit for the popular support that the Bill enjoys.

According to a public opinion poll published three years ago, 88 per cent. of those questioned supported the Bill. There is no reason to suppose that that overwhelming majority will have diminished. The Bill is timely in that animal welfare is moving rapidly up the agenda of the British consumer, thanks, in large part, to these organisations. A piece in *Agra Europe* on 4 July shows the way that things are moving. It reports:

"The welfare movement in meat production is gathering momentum and producers in the UK, Ireland and New Zealand are already taking steps to meet the expected change in demand. According to the UK Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC), welfare will become the area in which producers put most effort in the 1990s and will make the production of leaner meat a secondary target. Much of the impetus in the UK is coming from the five biggest supermarkets (Sainsbury, Tesco, Safeway, Asda and Gateway), which by the year 2000 are expected to be selling more than half the meat retailed in Britain. Tesco is retailing "Traditional Norfolk Reared Pork", Gateway is about to launch a similar line in pork and beef, Asda is already selling conservation grade lamb and Safeway is marketing organic beef."

I understand the concern of hon. Members who fear that British producers might be disadvantaged against continental competition. However, the argument that if our modes of production are better, we shall be better placed to compete in 1993 is more convincing. There may be a short-term dislocation in the market, but the combination of the welfare argument and the prospects of a better organised and more welfare-oriented system will give our producers an advantage. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made that point in a speech that was exemplary in every respect.

Mr. Martin Jones (Clwyd, South-West): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that many farmers would like a change in the law on pig husbandry because they can see the possibilities and opportunities created by the efforts of animal welfare promoters, the RSPCA and other worthy bodies, which have led to increased awareness among consumers about animal welfare?

Mr. Davies: That is very much so. Those who oppose the Bill have overstated their case. We have to recognise that the Bill is supported by a large number of producers, principally those who have already voluntarily changed to using methods that do not involve the tethering system.

I understand from the producers that the system is unacceptable and will have to be phased out and that it is in their interests to move as quickly as possible away from it voluntarily. They recognise that British agriculture will be better if this measure is on the statute book. There are differences of opinion about the European dimension, and the lead-in period is causing concern. The Government have expressed reservations about the measure. They believe that it should be dealt with in a different way. However, that need not excite hon. Members who have expressed strong opposition to the Bill.

The quotation from *Agra Europe* will have gladdened the hearts of all those who are concerned about farm animal welfare. There can be no arguments against the Bill on welfare grounds. It appears from what was said by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who is not here at the moment, and by a few other hon. Members that there is confusion about what the Bill covers. It relates only to dry sows, not to sows that are farrowing. Farrowing crates will continue to be used. Therefore, piglets will not be suffocated, due to the removal of dry sows. The argument that the Bill will reduce welfare considerations is not valid.

The debate continues in pig breeding circles about the welfare implications of dry sow stalls and tethers. There can be no argument that in this measure we are balancing what most experts agree is an improvement in animal welfare against a slight temporary economic dislocation. Animals should have the benefit of the doubt every time. We can do no better than refer to the Government's Farm Animal Welfare Council if we wish to obtain independent expert opinion. Reference has been made by several hon. Members to the 1988 assessment of pig production. The FAWC's fourth report says:

"Both stall and tether systems fail to meet certain welfare criteria to which we attach particular importance. As a result of their design, the animals housed in them are prevented from exercising and from displaying most natural behaviour patterns; in the wide range of systems seen by members there was little scope to reduce the continuing stress which can be caused by confinement in these systems . ... We recommend that future trends in housing the dry sow should be away from the use of stalls and tether systems (both girth and neck types) and that the Government should introduce legislation as a matter of urgency to prevent all further installations of units of these designs . . . We recommend that the Government should do all it can to encourage the adoption of alternative systems, whether new or traditional, and the improvement in husbandry skills needed to avoid welfare problems. As soon as it is satisfied that the necessary skills are available, the welfare-related problems have been eliminated from the emerging systems and that they are commercially viable, it should introduce immediate legislation to phase out stalls and tethers."

All those conditions have now been met. The Government acknowledge that they have been met, because they say that they accept the principles of the Bill and that they intend to phase out dry stall systems with tethers.

Unfortunately, in 1988 the Government could not find the time to implement the recommendations of the Farm Welfare Animal Council. However, they can keep good faith with the recommendations if they agree to support the Bill. If they feel that, for whatever reason, they cannot support it, I earnestly hope that they will not use their best endeavours to block it. The Government's acceptance of the Bill would be in line with the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council and those of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whose welfare code states:

"The keeping of sows and gilts in stalls with or without tethers raises serious welfare problems. It inevitably places severe restrictions on the animals' freedom of movement, denies them normal exercise, can give rise to patterns of abnormal behaviour and very commonly causes injury and leg weakness. Alternative systems, such as kennels, strawyards or yard and cubicles in which animals behavioural and excercise needs can be more fully met, are therefore strongly recommended".

That is the Ministry's code on the welfare of pigs. We could not have a clearer condemnation of the dry stall system.

I am disappointed and surprised that, following the introduction of the codes in 1983, eight years later we are still arguing about whether we should pass a minor Bill which will put into legislative practice those principles which have been endorsed by not only the Government, their scientific advisers and all the animal welfare groups but the overwhelming majority of public opinion. The attempt to frustrate the Bill's intentions is disgraceful.

[Mr. Davies]

I know that the Government have some difficulty with the measures because, in a press release on 23 January, they said:

"Confining pigs in small stalls on a routine basis cannot be justified under any circumstances".

That was the latest Government pronouncement. It was a green light to accept the Bill.

The Government's position on the Bill is slightly different. They say that they have difficulty with it because they propose a ban on new installations, which will go further than the Bill. I accept that, but I cannot imagine anyone in his right mind, having seen the House of Commons accept the Bill, next week voluntarily committing himself to capital expenditure to introduce a new system which he knows will be phased out. We welcome the Government's intention to introduce a ban, but it is a ban that will not take place anyway.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I shall give way in a moment.

Mr. Bowden: It is on that point.

Mr. Davies: In that case, I shall give way.

Mr. Bowden: I heartily approve what the Government said about banning any new stalls. Would not it be possible to introduce an amendment to the Bill in Committee dealing with that?

Mr. Davies: I was about to draw that conclusion. My instinct was not to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but courtesy caused me to do so.

The Government say also that they will extend the provision not only to dry sows but all pigs, which is clearly welcome. They also say that the phase-in period should be two years later than the time scale envisaged, and justified, by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston.

Those are three minor differences. Given the overwhelming agreement on the principle of the measure, it is sensible to agree to the unhindered passage of the Bill, get it into Committee as soon as possible and, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) suggested, consider in which ways it needs to be amended to provide any additional measures that the Government wish to introduce.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes talked about the European dimension. If the House agrees to the measure, that will considerably strengthen the Government's hand. It will reflect endorsement of the Bill's principle by the House of Commons. The Government will have to go to the European authorities on this matter. I congratulate them on their efforts in arguing for improved welfare standards. Their case will be strengthened immeasurably if they can say to the European authorities that the House has agreed to the measures, that the Bill is on the statute book and that we should ensure that the measures are adopted at European level. That would be a sensible, straightforward position to adopt.

I am delighted that the Government have accepted the principle of the Bill. We look forward to participating, in government or in opposition, in a considerable number of such welfare improvement measures in coming years. The public's appetite for them is increasingly evident, no doubt whetted by welfare considerations and the human health implications of some modern intensive practices.

I do not propose to raise the spectre of the various food scares of recent years, but there is no doubt that modern intensive farming methods have made a major contribution to those problems. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Holland with Boston who has followed the logic of his argument and has done much to warn us of the impending dietary and environmental disaster from locking our livestock away in cages. At last the tide is turning and thanks are due to people such as the hon. Gentleman who have set great store by the welfare of their livestock throughout their farming lives.

There are many alternative methods of keeping dry sows and such methods already accommodate nearly half of them. I know that there is some dispute about the figures and no doubt the Minister will tell us what his information has revealed. Many of the dry sows live in the most profitable and productive units. Loose-housed, dry sows on straw, if kept in small groups, have few welfare problems as do the large and growing number of sows kept on free range. The hon. Member for Holland with Boston has acknowledged, however, that neither of those systems is without some welfare implications.

Contrary to some of the propaganda from the Ministry and the manufacturers of intensive housing—clearly they have a vested interest—the alternative systems are tried, tested and successful. They are just as successful now as they were before the introduction of the dry sow stall and tether.

I recognise that there is some opposition to the Bill from certain sectors of the pig breeding industry. They argue that the Bill will discriminate against them in comparison to their European competitors who will be able to continue to use the sow stall and tether in their housing units. It is true that it is important that, on this matter, in common with all other farm animal welfare measures, action is taken on a European level. I urge the Minister to continue his efforts to raise this issue with his European colleagues, armed with the knowledge that United Kingdom consumers are demanding that action should be taken.

The National Pig Breeders Association has expressed particular concern to me and to a number of colleagues that discrimination against domestic producers will result in consumers exercising double standards. They will not be able to be sure whether their rashers of bacon come from United Kingdom farms that do not have any stalls or tethers or from continental farms that still use such methods. That particular problem was raised with my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is one of our Front-Bench spokesmen and is unavoidably absent today, by a large-scale pig producer in his constituency, Mr. Jackson of Jackson Farms, Appleby. I acknowledge that fear and I believe that it reinforces the argument for action at a European level. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Holland with Boston that that does not invalidate the need for action at a British level —the hon. Gentleman made that point with force.

When starting from scratch it makes good economic sense not to incorporate stalls and tethers in dry sow housing. Therefore, in the long run there would be no advantage to those who continue to use them.

If we develop a consumer-oriented system of welfare labelling, to which we are committed, the days of the sow stall will be numbered, even without the Bill. In the event of change, our pig producers might be at a disadvantage and British consumers may be unable to exercise choice by choosing pig products obtained from alternative systems. In that event we must accept the logic of a labelling system that identifies the method of production. British consumers may then ensure that there is no unfair advantage, because I am satisfied that even if there is a premium price, British consumers will be prepared to pay it in the knowledge that they are supporting a production system that meets the animal welfare needs that they have requested.

I know that the Government accept the general principle of labelling according to the method of production. I do not want to use this opportunity to criticise the Government in any way. I want to encourage them in their good work—sometimes I wish that they would go a little faster. The Opposition will support the Government when we believe that they are right and we shall urge them to go further when we believe that they have not gone far enough.

Not only have the Select Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Farm Animal Welfare Council and the Government's welfare code all highlighted the welfare implications of stalls or tethers; those systems have been implicitly condemned by the Brambell report and by the important European convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. Now, we have the biggest single step forward yet. On 10 January the Government committed themselves to abolishing the sow stall in Britain. The point at issue between the Government and the hon. Member for Holland with Boston essentially concerns the time scale—the phasing-out period.

I regret to say that the Pig Breeders Association has argued that the Bill is premature. Nothing could be further from the truth and I am surprised that anyone can seriously argue that line. For the manufacturers and users of the sow stall and tether, the writing has been on the wall for years. The Select Committee produced its report in 1981 and reflected opinion that had been current for many years previously—not only were stalls and tethers inadequate on welfare grounds; they were questionable in economic terms given that, at that time, the capital expenditure on a breeder's fattener unit was roughly £1,000 per sow place, compared to a tenth of that for a free range unit and a figure somewhere in between for a straw yard.

Far from being premature, the Bill is more than a little overdue. In 1988, the Farm Animal Welfare Council spoke authoritatively on sow stalls and tethers. If its advice had been taken by the producers then, we should not be in this position. Let us not forget that the council was set up to advise Ministers on precisely these matters. If its advice had been taken then, the eight-year phase-out period now proposed by the Government would end in 1996 and that is precisely what the Bill proposes.

Anyone who has installed tethers or stalls in the past few years has taken a calculated risk, knowing the potential consequences. Many producers will have had more use out of such systems than they expected when they installed them. The Government always say—we must bear it in mind that what they say and what they do are sometimes very different—that they take the advice of the Farm Animal Welfare Council very seriously. The council recommended abolition three years ago, so the Bill is not premature but at least three years late. Anybody who believed the Government's protestations must be very thankful that they have already had so many years' use out of their stall or tether systems. By 1996, they will have written down the cost and can then move on to using a less expensive dry sow housing system.

I realise that there are differences between the Government's intentions in the legislation that they propose and the provisions in the Bill. As I have said, they are not major differences, and the hon. Member for Holland with Boston is a sensible and eminently reasonable man and I have no doubt that if the House gives the Bill its Second Reading, he will happily discuss the implications and consider such matters in Committee. For those reasons, I hope that the Government will allow the Bill its Second Reading today. We can iron out our differences in Committee.

I assure the House that the Bill has the wholehearted support of the Labour party and I shall urge all my hon. Friends who are present today to support it in any Divisions that may be called.

1.13 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate and to contribute to the unnerving air of consensus which seems to characterise nearly all our debates these days.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) is well known for the interest that he takes in animal welfare matters. He is to be admired for the concern that he has shown for farm animals over many years and in presenting the Bill.

The last time that my hon. Friend and I were engaged on a major venture together was almost exactly five years ago when I had the privilege to be a very junior member of the Select Committee of which he was Chairman. Late one Monday night in April 1986 the Government lost the vote on Sunday trading. Early the following morning, my hon. Friend and I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) found ourselves in Washington, where we were engaged in a study of pesticides. Without our knowledge, President Reagan bombed Gaddafi that night. We had a very interesting visit to the United States —and we did not pay for a single drink ourselves.

I want to pay tribute to the many hon. Members on both sides of the House who have written to me about this issue. As some hon. Members have seen, it is true that I, as a constituency Member—and I suspect most hon. Members—have received infinitely more letters on this subject than on the major events taking place in the middle east. That does not surprise me when animal welfare matters are at stake.

I want also to pay tribute to many of my hon. Friends who, over the years, and during the two years that I have been at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, have been quietly lobbying and nobbling me behind the scenes about animal welfare. That will continue for the benefit of all of us and to the benefit of animals.

Let me begin by considering the history of the welfare debate on stall and tether systems. The use of those systems for keeping dry sows and gilts has been and is one of the subjects of greatest animal husbandry concern. The systems are criticised by animal welfare organisations and,

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as my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said, not all in the pig industry are content with them, either.

The Government too have had a long-standing policy of advising against the use of stalls and tethers and, more recently, of phasing them out. There is an equally long-standing commitment to research into the alternative systems. That research will not end with the current moves to remove stalls and tethers.

However, concern over conditions in which pigs are kept is nothing new. In 1772, a man by the name of Brauner, writing in Stockholm, described the agriculture literature of the time as constantly stressing the importance of providing swine with a dry lying place and straw bedding. He added that in those days systems were never used in which the pig was permanently tied or confined so that it could not separate the three functions of feeding, dunging and lying.

Indeed, most husbandry systems for dry sows used up until about the late 1950s to early 1960s consisted of individual pens or small groups which allowed the sows to use separate parts of the pen for those three functions. It was about this time that the close confinement systems were introduced. It has to be said that their introduction was not purely for economic reasons. It was thought that some welfare advantages would also result.

The first full examination of intensive livestock husbandry systems was in 1965 when the Brambell committee made its report at the request of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

To a large extent, it was publication of the book "Animal Machines" by Mrs. Ruth Harrison which first led to the widespread public interest in farm animal welfare and which led to the formation of the Brambell committee. I am pleased to say that Mrs. Harrison is still a member of the Farm Animal Welfare Council and was a member of its predecessor, the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

The Brambell report made a number of recommendations on pig welfare. The recommendation relevant to the debate today was:

"Pregnant sows should not be kept without daily exercise in quarters which do not permit them to turn round and, in any case, should not be tethered indoors".

During the 1980-81 Session of Parliament, the Select Committee on Agriculture, to which reference has been made today, examined animal welfare in poultry, pig and veal calf production. It published its report in July 1981. It also made a number of recommendations on the welfare of pigs relating to stall and tether systems including that

"The Code of Recommendations for Pigs should recommend that steps be taken to relieve frustration and boredom where sows are tethered or kept in stalls"

It went on to state:

"Efforts should be made to develop alternatives to the close confinement of pregnant sows. As soon as these are established as practicable and economic, notice should be given that close confinement will be phased out over a reasonable period. Governments should support the necessary research and development work. Financial grants should be used to support the small-group system and should not be given to producers using close-confinement methods . . . Pigs housed indoors should always have access to a bedded area, and the Code of Recommendations should say so".

The Government's welfare code for pigs, based on recommendations from the Farm Animal Welfare Council, was revised in 1983. It tood account of the Brambell committee's recommendations and gave the clear warning that

"The keeping of sows and gilts in stalls with or without tethers raises serious welfare problems. It inevitably places severe restrictions on the animals' freedom of movement, denies them normal exercise, can give rise to patterns of abnormal behaviour and very commonly causes injuries and leg weakness".

However, the code went on to say that alternative systems, although recommended, required higher levels of stockmanship and increased capital investment. It was not thought then that the time was right to phase out those systems.

The next major review of stalls and tethers came with the publication in 1988 of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's assessment of pig production systems. At that time, the council considered that it was possible to ban new installations of stalls and tethers. However, a phase-out date for existing systems could still not be set. The council passed to the Government the responsibility for deciding when alternatives would be viable and sufficiently free of welfare problems. In the Government's response, we accepted the Council's recommendations. As there was a proposal for Community legislation concerning the welfare of pigs under discussion, it seemed most sensible to try to have the Council's recommendations accepted on a Community basis, and that is what we have striven to achieve. The Community negotiations are, however, taking longer than we wished, and we have now decided that the time has come to set an example to the rest of Europe.

Finally, a seminar organised by the European conference group on the protection of farm animals was held last November. This seminar, attended by a wide range of interests, concluded that alternative systems could now replace the stall and tether systems. The reservations that existed at the time of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendations concerning the problems which could arise with alternative systems have therefore now been satisfactorily resolved.

The Government have therefore been re-examining welfare aspects of the use of stalls and tethers. The Farm Animal Welfare Council considers husbandry systems in the context of the "five freedoms". They are first, freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; secondly, appropriate comfort and shelter; thirdly, prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury and disease; fourthly, freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour; and, fifthly freedom from fear.

It is clear that stall and tether systems do not meet all those freedoms and, in particular, sows certainly cannot display

"most normal patterns of behaviour in them".

That is not to say that alternative systems are perfect—it is unlikely that any husbandry system will ever reach perfection in welfare terms. However, the scientific evidence that close confinement causes unacceptable welfare problems is now overwhelming.

In 1977, for example, it was reported that confined sows were not able to groom normally, that they may have difficulty maintaining the correct body temperature, that most are fed small amounts of food infrequently and that they cannot interact normally with other sows.

Stereotyped behaviour is one response shown by a variety of animals to such situations in which the individual has little control of its environment.

Stereotyped behaviour is a pattern of repetitive actions that are fixed in form and orientation and serve no obvious function. It can be caused by confinement and boredom in a barren environment when the animal is unable to carry out most of its normal patterns of behaviour. Stereotypes are an indicator of poor welfare and they are frequently seen in many stall and tether units. The relatively low volumes of feed commonly given to pregnant sows may be a contributory factor to poor welfare, but the confinement itself must be a major problem for the animal.

Mr. John Townend: Does my hon. Friend accept that farrowing crates, which are not dealt with in the Bill, cause the same problems? He accepts that keeping dry sows in single stalls throughout the whole period is unsatisfactory. Will he also accept that there is a case for keeping them in stalls for 28 to 30 days immediately after they have been put in pig because there are problems of bullying and other problems at that time?

Mr. Maclean: I accept much of what my hon. Friend says. Neither the Bill nor our regulations propose to deal with farrowing crates. We see welfare disadvantages in farrowing crates; but there are also tremendous disadvantages in the alternatives when pigs are about to litter. We pointed out in our regulations that we wish pigs to be confined in farrowing crates for the minimum period during the period of pregnancy when they are about to litter. But research and development is continuing into alternatives to those systems, too.

In 1984 and 1987 it was observed that pigs in tethers spent less time in active behaviour. Pigs in stalls showed increased amounts of stereotyped behaviour such as licking and biting of the stalls and a higher incidence of aggressive actions. Physiological measurements taken from the pigs indicated that they were showing a chronic stress response as a result of confinement. Sows subjected to this stress were considered by one author to be suffering from clinical neurosis.

Stereotyped behaviour is recorded in tethered sows as well as those in stalls. Studies of stereotypes in tethered sows lead us to the conclusion that the behaviour can be spread to newly introduced sows, thus contributing to the stress experienced by the newcomers.

Stall and tether systems, in particular those using tethers, are often the cause of injuries. Skin lesions caused by chafing of the tethers are not uncommon and were reported in 1986 as arising at levels of 39 per cent. and 21 per cent. of the animals in two herds studied. Girth tethering can lead to increased udder damage because the sow is impeded when getting up. Increased incidence of urinary infection and lameness in closely confined pigs has also been recorded.

However, as the Farm Animal Welfare Council has accepted, the alternatives available are not without their problems. The lack of control over injuries caused by aggressive interactions between sows and bullying of individuals at the bottom of the dominance chain are typical examples. As I have said, it is unlikely that any husbandry system will be completely free of welfare problems. So it has been a fine judgment to decide when the time is right to take action. The industry itself has all but abandoned new installations of stalls and tethers. But, contrary to what has been said this morning, we have evidence that a few have been installed in the past few years. However, the industry has largely given up the system. The only real question that remained was how long was needed for existing systems to be phased out, and whether we could go ahead in advance of the rest of the European Community.

Against that background, we must look at the economic situation of the industry. I have already emphasised that in 1989 the Government fully accepted the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council for phasing out stall and tether systems. We have always made it clear that we wished to pursue this matter on an EC basis, and we shall continue discussions to secure Community agreement on these measures as soon as possible. I give that firm assurance to the House. But the Community seems reluctant to move. Now that there are viable alternatives to stall and tether systems, we believe that we must go it alone.

However strong the arguments on the welfare aspects, we cannot be blind to the dangers that moving on a unilateral basis will present to the competitive position of our pig industry. The pig industry is totally dependent on pig breeders. If breeders went out of, or reduced, production, there would be fewer piglets for the fatteners to rear. We would run the risk of increased imports of pigmeat produced by the very systems that we were banning in this country. There would be less pigmeat for our slaughterers and processing plants to handle. There would be a smaller market for our cereal producers and feed processors. Other ancillary trades would also be affected. A large number of our people are involved, either directly or indirectly, in the pigmeat industry. We do not want to put those people out of work, nor to hand over an even larger slice of our pork—especially our bacon—market to producers in other member states producing under the very system that we would have banned.

The United Kingdom pig industry is an important part of our agricultural and national economy. We must bear that fact very much in mind and proceed carefully.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) rubbished the unilateral argument and quoted the example of veal crates. I shall tell him the direct effect of the veal crate ban, which I am proud that we introduced unilaterally on 1 January last year. The net effect, not in commercial terms as I do not know the figures but in welfare terms, is that veal is now eaten in this country which has been imported from overseas and produced under the same system that we thought was inhumane and that we banned. Because of the treaty of Rome, we cannot ban such imports.

Mr. Ron Davies: I share the Minister's concern about the development of the live export trade in calves. Does he acknowledge the fact that, because we have taken that action in this country, it immeasurably strengthens his hand when he is arguing in the Council of Ministers for the adoption of a ban on veal crates throughout the Community?

Mr. Maclean: That is a fallacious argument, and I shall deal with it later, as other hon. Members have made the same point. It does not necessarily strengthen our hand to be unilateral in Europe. Firm scientific advice on the judgments that we take is what strengthens our hand.

Mr. John Townend: My hon. Friend has been arguing a poignant case against the Bill and has been using the veal

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example in support of that case. If he is so worried about the pig industry and believes that it may suffer the same problems as the veal industry, why is he putting forward these proposals?

Mr. Maclean: I have already told the House that a fine judgment has to be made here. We believe that, because alternative systems are now available, and because of the increased welfare benefits, we should act upon this matter now, and we shall make strenuous efforts to ensure that the European Community agrees with us as quickly as it can. However, I do not want any hon. Member to dismiss the unilateral argument out of hand, and to say that there is no problem about Britain acting unilaterally. There are problems, but at times we decide that we must do it for welfare considerations.

There has been some discussion in the House about the percentage of sows housed in such systems. Our estimate is that about 70 per cent. of the 800,000 sows in the United Kingdom at present are housed in stalls, but, whether it is 50, 60 or 70 per cent., as we are in agreement on the main principle, we should not argue over the figures. The natural life span of these stall systems is about 15 years, and very few have been installed in the past three years. I have no sympathy for pig producers who installed stall and tether systems after the Government announced in 1989 that we had accepted the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendations for phasing out stall and tether systems. That means that there are still a large number of stalls which were built before that date, and which pig farmers could reasonably have expected to last up to 13 years. To ask pig breeders to take out their stalls within too short a time scale would clearly lead to a great deal of wasted investment, and might encourage them to leave the industry altogether.

The need for a transition period of sensible length is reinforced by the consideration that those in the pig industry make a precarious living. The pig industry has not enjoyed the same degree of support under the CAP as the producers of some other commodities. The pigmeat regime is a light one. There is no public intervention. Within the ring fence of the Community's borders there is very much a free market and producers have to make their living from the market price. Given the fierceness of competition, and the vagaries of the pig cycle, margins over time are slim and are often non-existent and at times highly negative. In short, there is not much money available for reinvestment.

My staff in the economics department of the Ministry have carried out a very careful calculation of the economic costs to the industry of a ban on sow stalls . On the best assumptions which they can make, they estimate that the economic costs of banning sow stalls to the industry, in terms of wasted investment and additional running cost, would be £99 million if there was an immediate ban. Even if the ban was delayed for five years the cost would still be £30 million which I believe to be an unacceptably high figure and one which would encourage a good number of pig breeders to go out of production. If the transition period extends to the time limit that we have proposed, the cost falls to around £9 million which, it seems to me, is a figure which we could ask the industry to live with. It compares with the total value of our pig industry's output of about £1 billion.

But the industry has the potential to offset some of these costs. Many consumers in this country consider farm animal welfare very important. They are prepared to pay a premium for produce from animals which they believe are reared under conditions best suited to their welfare. In future the pig industry will be able to say with all honesty that it is not using the systems that have caused so much controversy. I appeal to our farmers and producers to capitalise on the lead that they will have over the rest of the Community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) suggested that I become devious and ban pigmeat imports from these countries. That is not the solution. It is not for me to be devious but for our producers to become good marketeers. I spend a great deal of time speaking to consumers and meeting consumer groups; I go round the shops and big supermarkets and I can see the trends in them. Some sell "conservation-grade" meat, some "traditional" meat. I tell the shops that we shall monitor them to make sure that the terms that they use are factually correct so that the consumers are not deceived.

I share the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and not just because I visited Northern Ireland and had a chance to go round the Province just before Christmas. I believe that there is a marketing opportunity, but it will not simply land in farmers' laps. They will have to go out and then persuade consumers to buy British pigmeat. When the regulations come into force or if this Bill is passed, some time this decade British pigmeat will be produced under systems with greater welfare benefits than those in any other country in the European Community. That gives us a possible competitive advantage—if we seize it.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): My hon. Friend's figures puzzle me. I have been trying to work them out: £99 million if there is an immediate ban; if we wait for eight years, £9 million; if we wait for five, £30 million. I can make no sense of that. The progression seems wrong, but the figures seem to be loaded in favour of the Minister's argument and against that of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body).

Mr. Maclean: I do not want to take up too much time going into the figures in depth. Our economics division has worked them out carefully. The short answer is that the figures relate to an exponential curve. We examine not just capital costs but the running costs of the enhanced systems. I can take my hon. Friend through the arguments later if he wants; I have pages of statistics with me, but I do not want to bore the House with them.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Minister speaks about the positive advantages and the protection that would accrue from enhanced production methods. Does he accept that the logic of that argument is for him to introduce a labelling system for all animal products sold in Britain indicating the system under which they have been produced? That would be an enormous advantage to the consumer because it would allow him to exercise choice, and it would give the producer a market advantage.

Mr. Maclean: I do not want to be led into the labelling trap because time is pressing and other hon. Members wish to speak. Our independent food advisory committee has just published a huge review of all aspects of labelling, and

welfare labelling was one of the topics considered. I expect that that massive report is in my weekend box. That will ensure that I am kept out of mischief this weekend.

Of course the Government are generally committed to the principle of more informative consumer labelling, but I stress potential marketing advantages and hammer home the point that farmers and producers need not think that there will be an automatic marketing advantage. They must get out there and tell the consumer. It sometimes grieves me to know that our egg producers are not drawing to the attention of consumers the potential benefit that British eggs may have over imported eggs.

Mr. John Townend: Could my hon. Friend give the split between capital and revenue costs, which is quite important?

Mr. Maclean: We calculate that the capital costs of buildings and equipment for sow stalls and alternative housing systems are considered to be broadly equal at about £400 per sow place. In both cases it is assumed that the total investment has a life span of about 15 years and that repair costs of £40 per place will be incurred in the last five years. Additional running costs will be associated with the alternative systems because they must have a higher quality of animal husbandry and better qualified pig men. The level of the additional costs will depend on the type of system used and the value of additional inputs.

I do not want to spend 10 minutes going through all the economics of the industry, but I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) about the figures that I have given and about the view that the Ministry has taken on the calculation of the costs. We think that an instant ban would cost the industry an extra £99 million and that a five-year ban would cost £30 million. Under the time scale that we propose the figure can be reduced to about £9 million.

When stalls and tethers are phased out in the rest of Europe, we must have our systems and management up and running and operating as efficiently as possible and in the best interests of the animals so that we are ready to seize the potential marketing advantage. Taking all that into account, the Government believe that changes can and should be introduced now. Powers already exist under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 for Ministers to make regulations about the welfare of livestock and, in particular, on the dimensions and layout of accommodation. The enabling Act is already in place and its powers will be used to implement any agreed Community obligations for pig welfare.

As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 10 January that he intended to use those powers to make regulations to phase out stall and tether systems for pigs by 31 December 1998. A consultation exercise, which is required by the 1968 Act, has already begun.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) asked whether we had the competence to introduce these regulations. We have the competence unilaterally to make them, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston has the legal power to pursue his Bill. Of course we cannot enforce our regulations on other countries, nor can we ban their products because their pigmeat has not been produced under the system that is required by our regulations.

It has been argued that our EC partners will think that an Act of Parliament resulting from the Bill has a higher standing or is more important than regulations. I see no reason for giving credence to that case. I am afraid to say, although it grieves me to do so, that we must not kid ourselves that the EC Commission pays strict attention to measures going through the House, and differentiates between whether they are Bills or regulations. Nor will it pay tremendous attention to what happens on Friday mornings in this Chamber.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), whose contributions I always enjoy, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) said that, if we reject the Bill, we shall send the wrong signal to Europe. That would be true if we did nothing at all, but I am not proposing to do nothing at all, because that would be wrong. I am asking the House to note that our new draft regulations, which are wider in scope than the Bill——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: They are only in draft form.

Mr. Maclean: They have to be in draft form because we must go out to consultation. When the consultation has finished in February, I shall ask the House to pass the regulations into law. I believe that the regulations will be better and will go further than my hon. Friend's Bill. If the EC pays attention to what the House does, it cannot fail to be impressed by these regulations, which will become British law if the House agrees to them.

Mr. Bruce: Given the time scale that the Minister has just given us, with the consultations finished by the end of February, would it not be appropriate for him to support Second Reading and bring the results of the consultations to the Committee so that the Committee can determine what should happen on the basis of those arguments?

Mr. Maclean: That is for the House to decide. I am merely saying that, as our regulations are wider in scope than the Bill, they do everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston wishes to do with his Bill, and on other technicalities do even more. We have a disagreement on the time scale. I leave the decision to the judgment of the House, but I hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw the Bill and go for the regulations.

The regulations that we have proposed will vary from the provisions of the Bill. The major differences are in relation to the scope of the provisions and the time by which all systems must comply.

I note with interest that the Bill does not appear to prevent new installations of stall or tether systems. It would be highly unlikely, and dashed stupid, for a farmer to go ahead with such installations. Nevertheless, that point should be addressed, and our regulations do so.

With regard to the scope, I believe that our proposals go further than the Bill in some important respects. There are some producers, if only few, who keep boars and finishing pigs in close confinement systems. There is no justifiable reason for keeping these animals in such a way, and our regulations will, therefore, apply to all pigs.

It is also our intention to phase out all forms of tethering, not just tethers for indoor pigs. It is the Government's view that the potential injuries and frustration that can be caused by tethers can arise in outdoor systems just as easily as in indoor ones. In addition, the old outdoor tethering systems, using a harness on a 10 to 15 ft rope, might be reintroduced. Such

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ropes can get tangled around trees or other obstacles. Of course, the possibilities for injury if they are not properly adjusted are just as severe as with ordinary tethers. We see no good reason to take these chances, and they will be outlawed by our regulations.

The date by which all stall and tether systems must comply is the most contentious aspect of the regulations. The industry would prefer such action to be taken on a Community basis or, if we have to do it unilaterally, over a period of 10 years or even more. The Bill, along with many voices in the welfare lobby, proposes a five-year period.

The signs are that European Community action to phase out stalls and tethers will not take place before the Commission has undertaken a review of these systems. It is difficult to predict when the EC will follow our lead. I warn the House that we shall be hard pushed, even after the most strenuous efforts, which we shall continue to take, to get it to agree the deadline in our regulations. I am certain that, irrespective of the efforts made by the Government, hon. Members and welfare organisations, the EC will not phase out stalls and tether systems within the five years proposed in the Bill. Therefore, we have proposed the date of 31 December 1998 as a realistic balance between the ideal for the industry and the five years proposed by the Bill, which the Government believe would reduce the competitiveness of the industry too much and allow in further imports of foreign pigmeat produced under the system that we would have outlawed.

There are other minor differences between the Bill and our proposals, particularly in areas where legitimate close confinement should be allowed for short periods. The Government's proposals have been sent to all interested parties for comment. The comments received will be considered quickly but most carefully before draft regulations are placed before the House. I am sorry that my hon. Friend—as I shall call him—the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) is not in his place. Both to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) may I say that I understand from my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office that, following the usual practice, their regulations are not included with ours but that there is a firm intention to follow the lead that we are taking in our regulations.

Let me make it clear that the Government's proposals have not been led by the industry's economic concerns. Both my hon. Friend's Bill and our regulations will have an impact on the competitiveness of the industry. The regulations are firmly opposed by some sections of the industry. I have already said that there is a real risk that the increased costs to the industry, both capital and running costs, will lead to more imports of pigmeat produced under the stall and tether system. Until we can achieve a Community ban on stalls and tethers, those increased imports are likely to be from animals kept in the systems that we are acting against. Our time scale reduces that risk to a level with which we believe the industry can live.

The Government's timetable also has welfare considerations. Many people seem to believe that to stick sows into group housing systems, whether indoors or outside will magically lead to perfect welfare conditions. That is not necessarily true. While alternative systems may be ready—and some are working well in practice—the level of stockmanship required to operate them must be of a high order, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston acknowledged, if different welfare problems are not to take the place of those created by stalls and tethers. That was recognised by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in its 1988 assessment of pig production systems. Farmers cannot find high calibre pig men and pig women to operate the alternative systems without a significant period being allowed for recruitment and training.

Let us not be in any doubt that this is a major task for the industry. If the welfare of pigs is to be improved, the industry must be given a sensible period within which to achieve that objective. Five years is a long time, but I remain to be convinced that the industry can achieve its target within that time. If it does not do so, the animals will suffer.

I believe that the Government's proposals will go further in providing welfare protection for pigs than the Bill now being discussed. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has told us for the first time that the Scottish agricultural colleges back the Government's approach. Everyone will respect their independent view. I believe that the timetable for the final phasing out date for stall and tether systems is far more realistic than that proposed by the Bill which, as I have already said, would probably serve only to export our welfare problems while causing damage to our industry.

The Government's proposals will ensure that this country remains in the forefront in its commitment to farm animal welfare. Our producers will rear pigs under the most humane systems in the Community. The industry should make that fact known to consumers. The Government will not forget their commitment to raise welfare standards not only in this country but in the European Community. In future discussions on European pig welfare legislation, we shall continue to fight for our minimum standards to be adopted on a Community basis, and as quickly as possible. The Government's proposed regulations can only strengthen our hand in achieving that goal.

1.59 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I warmly congratulate——

Sir Richard Body: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Several hon. Members who have been in the Chamber for many hours wish to take part in the debate. They should be heard.

Mr. Amess: I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) on introducing the Bill. I have no intention of delaying the proceedings and I shall have no hesitation in supporting the Bill. I arrived here this morning, naively believing that not many hon. Members would wish to speak and that this was a fairly uncontentious measure—how wrong one can be.

The House may wonder about Basildon's interest in the Bill. There are still 28 farms and smallholdings in Basildon and a few of my constituents still keep pigs. My constituents enjoy pork, ham and bacon, but they have no wish to enjoy that food if it has been produced by cruel

means. It is clear that tethering sows for four months is cruel and is a treatment more suited to being dished out to Mr. Hussein.

Between 1955 and 1959 my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston represented the constituency which I now represent and he is still remembered with affection by my constituents. He will recall how warmly the people of Vange thought about him. A few years ago, those people came to my surgery complaining about the cruel tethering of horses, ponies and donkeys. I introduced a ten-minute Bill and, judging by what happened this morning, I had better fortune than my hon. Friend. With the assistance of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), the then Minister, the Bill went through on the nod and the debate in the other place resulted in its name being changed. I am happy to tell the House that since 1988 there has been an Act that prevents horses, ponies and donkeys from being cruelly tethered.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston on the Bill. I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

2.2 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Naturally, like all civilised people, in principle I am in favour of animal welfare and against cruelty. There is room for improvement in every aspect of agriculture and I understand the argument by my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) about tethering. Tethering is being phased out, but the Bill goes too far, too fast.

This debate occurs on a Friday, and I am sure that my colleagues will accept that it is rather unusual to see me here on this day. I usually have constituency engagements, but I am taking part in this debate because pork production is a major industry in my constituency and because there are nearly 200 pig producers in it—indeed, there are more pigs than people. My area is the biggest pig-producing area in the United Kingdom and has some of the most efficient pig producers in Europe. So important are pigs to our part of the country that my daughter and son-in-law bought me two stone pigs as a Christmas present to put outside my door.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said that few people are employed in this industry and that most of the work is done by the farmers. That is untrue. Many of my pig units employ a large number of staff who are well trained and have attended agricultural college.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston talked about animal rights—pig rights—and, in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), I began to wonder where it would all end. I thought that he might suggest that pigs should have votes. I am sure that the Opposition would support that, as I do not believe that I would be back here after the next election. Animals do not and cannot have the same rights as human beings. The whole process of producing meat for human consumption demonstrates that that would not be practical. People who go over the top about this can only justify their attitude if they are vegetarians, and I accept that there are such people about.

In one part of my constituency, Holderness, there are 112 pig farmers. My hon. Friend is wrong to suggest that a large proportion of pig producers are moving away from single stalls and tethers because, of that 112, 105 would be affected by the Bill. Not all those farms are large and my hon. Friend is also wrong to say that it is only those farms that will suffer. My hon. Friend has argued that many farms do not have any staff and that the farmer works seven days a week, but he then argued that by moving to loose styes there will be more work. Who will do that work? Unless the small-scale farmer undertakes that work he will have to incur the extra cost of employing another man.

We are all pleased at the success of the pig industry. My hon. Friend spoke about the increase in exports. Despite his criticism of the industry in my constituency, many of the exports come from east Yorkshire. Exports of breeding stock, in particular, come from one of the most famous producers—Northern Pig Development.

We all accept that there will be a small premium market that will appeal to the green element in society. I noted with interest what my hon. Friend said about Safeway—no doubt that store will be copied by Tesco and Sainsbury. I assure my hon. Friend that if my pig producers thought that they could get 25 per cent. more on the cost of their pigs by changing their system, the system would change tomorrow.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on coming second in the ballot. Ever since I entered the House 11 years ago I have seen a regrettable steady decline in the number of hon. Members who could be described as characters and their own men. I am pleased to say that I have always looked upon my hon. Friend as his own man, and without any doubt he is a parliamentary character. He is an independent man, a person of integrity and courage. Over the years I have greatly admired the way in which he has criticised the nonsense of the agricultural policy of the Common Market. However, I was hurt and saddened at what I considered to be his unwarranted attack on the pig industry when he launched his Bill. I was saddened at his attack on the pig farmers in my constituency and, in particular, on the stockmen. I am sure that my hon. Friend is a generous man and that, on reflection, he will accept that criticism, especially as he admitted to the House that he had not visited a single farm. If the *Yorkshire Post* has misreported him, no doubt my hon. Friend will wish to intervene and I shall be happy to allow him to do so.

My hon. Friend's remarks were so outrageous that they were described in the *Yorkshire Post* in the following terms:

> "A scathing attack on Humberside's more intensive pig producers has come from the Tory MP, Sir Richard Body at the launch of his Private Members Bill on pig husbandry yesterday. Sir Richard, MP for Holland with Boston, said he thought it would be a very good thing if many of the regions 1,000 sow producers went out of business."

With respect, that was an appalling thing to say. I know that my hon. Friend has been involved in agriculture for many years. He has also been a Member of Parliament for many years. I do not know whether he has ever faced bankruptcy but he should realise that when people go out of business and go bankrupt there are enormous effects not only for them but for their families and for those who work for them.

Sir Richard Body: Let me clear this matter up. What I said then, and what I have said in my hon. Friend's constituency on two occasions, is that livestock farming should be conducted in smaller units. I deplore the fact

[Sir Richard Body]

that livestock farming is involving larger and larger units because that is not good farming. That was my point. I do not want anyone to go bankrupt.

Mr. Townend: If many of the 1,000 sow producers go out of business, more than simply one or two big producers will be involved. As I said, there are 200 pig producers in my constituency.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Let me interpose myself between my two hon. Friends. The key point is that if there are more smaller pig producers, there are more, not fewer, jobs. My hon. Friend should realise that there will be changes; we heard as much from the Minister. The question concerns timing and whether we should go further. I think that the House would like the Bill to go into Committee and to see what happens after that. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) may prefer to have no change at all, but he must face the fact that that choice is not available. The question is whether he and others propose to continue the debate for 10 or 20 minutes and prevent the House from reaching a decision on the Second Reading of the Bill, when pigmeat consumers clearly want to have confidence in what they eat. I believe that the pig producers' best friend is my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston, who, like so many of us, wants the Bill to go into Committee.

Mr. Townend: I represent the biggest pig producing area in the country. Not one pig farmer has written to me in support of the Bill. I am in contact with my farmers on a regular basis and I have not met one farmer who is in favour of the Bill.

The remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston have caused great upset in my constituency. He is reported to have said:

"I think they are not good farmers; not good livestock men at all."

How he can say that about farms he has never visited, I do not know. My hon. Friend continued:

"I know how they spend their time: sat behind mahogany desks with a computer."

I do not know what is significant about a mahogany desk and I cannot believe that my hon. Friend really thinks that farming can be carried on today without a desk, without paperwork and without adequate costings. Even Members of Parliament have been dragged reluctantly into the 20th century and have their own computers. My hon. Friend went on to say, although I do not know how he could say this, given that he has not been to any farms:

"They also recruited a very poor type of stockman. I regard stockmanship as an art. In their eyes it's entirely a science, and I don't think they make good farmers."

It was most inappropriate for my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston to attack the work force in the industry and his attack was greatly resented. Many stockmen in the pig industry attended the Bishop Burton agricultural college. They are very dedicated men.

It is a matter of argument whether something is a science or an art. Just because my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston believes that the industry is an art, that does not mean that those who think it is a science are wrong. My hon. Friend went on to say that many would "throw in the sponge" over the coming years. If the Bill is enacted, many people in the pig industry will do that because they will face financial pressure.

I agreed with a great deal of what my hon. Friend the Minister said. However, he accepted that the Bill would place enormous financial pressure on the industry. Having said that, and having put forward many of the arguments that I intended to put forward and with which I agreed 100 per cent., I could not understand why my hon. Friend the Minister reached his conclusions.

I will give the House an idea of the resentment caused by the remarks of my hon.. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston. In a letter to the *Yorkshire Post* on 19 January, a pig farmer called Mr. Dewhirst wrote

"The only element of truth in that statement is that nearly all pig farmers use computers to record the performance of their herds."

I cannot understand why my hon. Friend opposes the use of computers. Mr. Dewhirst, continued:

"They are an essential aid to management and are used in many other areas of agriculture just as they are in all industry."

Without being offensive to my hon. Friend, Mr. Dewhirst went on to write:

"This modern-day Luddite would obviously far prefer to see us all blundering in the dark without the use of any technological advance whatsoever.

His second assertion that 'pig farmers in Humberside have recruited a very poor type of stockman' is a disgraceful slur on some of the more dedicated and hard working men and women employed in agriculture.

Humberside possesses some of the most efficient pig units in the world, with numbers of piglets reared per sow per year being the envy of many Continental producers."

If the Bill enters Standing Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston has an opportunity to speak, I hope that he will give a full apology to the industry and in particular to the very hard working dedicated stockmen in the industry who are great believers in animal welfare and care for their animals more than anyone else.

Unlike many hon. Members present today, I have been to see some of the best run pig units. I visited some of those units in my constituency last Saturday and that was a very good way to spend a Saturday. I visited one of Mr. Dewhirst's units. According to my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston, Mr. Dewhirst is one of those computer pig breeders who sits behind a mahogany desk.

Mr. Dewhirst began breeding pigs in 1972 with 140 sows. Over the years he has expanded his business and he now runs five pig units with 1,700 sows producing more than 35,000 bacon pigs a year. Before starting his pig business, he spent three years at agricultural college completing his national diploma in agriculture and a diploma in pig technology at Harper Adams college. Mr. Dewhirst employs very skilled and efficient people.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend's visit is yet another example of the superb way in which he always tackles issues so valiantly for his constituents. He speaks up for them at every opportunity and that is an example for every hon. Member. However, in view of the strong feelings that have been expressed today, does not my hon. Friend believe that we should vote on the Second Reading so that we can decide whether we accept his opinion or that of other hon. Members?

Mr. Townend: I understand that whatever I do today, if there is sufficient support for the Bill, it will go into Standing Committee. That is not a matter for me. It is for the promoter of the Bill to see whether he has enough

supporters. I do not think that the National Farmers Union has covered itself with glory. There has been a sparsity of hon. Members from agricultural constituencies. Many hon. Members had not even been approached by the NFU.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He has dealt with interventions with courtesy. Does he agree that if, say, 88 hon. Members wanted the Bill to be voted on and he was the only person, with two hon. Friends, who did not, it would not come to a vote and that the publicity for weeks afterwards would be such that consumers of bacon and pork would believe that it was not right to eat British bacon and that farmers would lose because of that?

Mr. Townend: With respect, my hon. Friend——

Sir Richard Body *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 118, Noes 0.

Division No. 47] **[2.20 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dobson, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Fearn, Ronald
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Knox, David
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCartney, Ian
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Neubert, Sir Michael
Norris, Steve
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Peter Bottomley.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Townend and
Mr. William Hague.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Domestic Smoke Alarms Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 1 February

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) objected to a Bill designed to save more than 700 lives a year. It is an absolute disgrace that it has been treated in that way—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I require the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. He cannot debate legislation at this time.

WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. McCartney: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker. Order. I require the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I have answered his point of order. I know how passionately he and many other hon. Members feel about legislation which has not been reached. I require him to conform with the courtesies of the House and to resume his seat.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that an hon. Member who sits on the Front Bench should deliberately frustrate the will of the House on a private Member's Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

EDUCATION PROVISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 22 February.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

WRITTEN CONSTITUTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Member: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

HOUSING (HOMELESS PERSONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

WELFARE OF ANIMALS AT SLAUGHTER BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE ARBITRATION, PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 29th January, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),—

(1) Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Heseltine relating to Local Government Finance not later than Ten o'clock; and

(2) the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hunt relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, and, if those proceedings have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at the expiry of that period put the Questions necessary to dispose of them; and

(3) the aforesaid Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 31st January, if proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. John MacGregor relating to Parliamentary Pensions have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall, three hours after the Motion has been entered upon,—

(a) if the Question last proposed from the Chair is the Main Question, call a Member to move any amendments thereto which he may have selected, and the Questions thereon shall be put forthwith, and then put the Main Question or the Main Question as amended; or—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

DTI Policies (Environmental Implications)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

2.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate a matter—the environmental implications of DTI policy and counter-trade deals—which, although from its subject title might appear somewhat dry and technical, will, I hope, be understood by hon. Members on both sides of the House to be a matter of importance.

The theme that links both the subjects of my debate is the international global environment, about which the Government say that they have a strong concern, and on the subject of which they have produced a White Paper saying so. My concern is that some areas of Government activity affect international matters, but they do not always seem to be consistent with their environmental policy objectives.

Earlier this week the House debated the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill, as the Minister for Trade knows. I welcome the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) to the Front Bench again today. I apologise for landing him here on a Friday, but the day is not my fault, and I am glad to have the opportunity of this debate. The Bill will effectively privatise that Government activity, and I read what the Minister had to say on that occasion and followed the debate. That Bill does not change the nature of my subject matter or the appropriateness of this debate.

I shall give examples, as that is the best way to illustrate the problem and my complaints about current Government practice.

The first is a specific example of the role of the Export Credits Guarantee Department in relation to a loan taken out in 1985, when the Bank of Scotland won a mandate to provide a £10 million credit line to the Bank of Ghana. That was guaranteed by the ECGD on the basis that the loan was for equipment and management services for timber rehabilitation. In the early 1980s, timber exports from Ghana had hit an all-time low. In 1983 production was running at only 16 per cent. of capacity. There had been an internal agreement between the industry and the Government of Ghana that there should be redevelopment of the industry but that it should be carried out on a sustainable basis. This is an area which has tropical forests which are important to the global environment as well as to the economy of Ghana.

Ghana and its timber industry sought world assistance. A loan was obtained from the Bank of Scotland, as well as loans from other countries, including Canada and Saudi Arabia. However, the loans did not provide sufficient resources to ensure the required expertise and personnel and to achieve a sustainable forestry pattern. As a result, forests containing old trees were felled, but there was no corresponding reforestation and, by 1987, the rate of deforestation had reached about 22,000 hectares per year, whereas only 4,000 hectares were being replanted, a much smaller amount than a decade earlier. The rate of deforestation was five times that of replanting.

The link with our Government was the fact that the ECGD supported the loan from the Bank of Scotland. It was a private sector loan and not a Government loan, but the loan, and the fact that it was approved by our Government, caused environmental damage to the forestry of Ghana, which is an important part of the world for forests.

The question that is common to that example and to the subject that I shall raise in the second half of my speech, is how Government Departments co-ordinate their assessment of the environmental implications of their actions abroad and, more importantly, the activities of British companies or individuals which have environmental implications abroad. I do not believe that that assessment is carried out properly yet. The ECGD would have played the Government role in this case.

I have discussed the matter with a Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence during the course of a deputation from the campaign against the arms trade. Three Departments are always involved in arms deals, two are involved in others—the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Foreign Office advises other Government Departments on the suitability of an activity—if it is Government activity —or on the suitability of commercial activity, by disapproving deals which were unsuitable from the perspective of human rights, for example. Notionally the Foreign Office also takes responsibility for our overseas environmental policy.

I discovered in the context of debate on Antarctica, that the lead Department in foreign environmental policy is the Foreign Office, not the Department of the Environment. In this case it appears that the DTI, through its soon to be privatised but still in-house agency, the ECGD, agreed to support a loan, but there had not been a full environmental assessment of the project's impact on Ghana, so environmental viability was not assessed together with financial viability when approval was given. I hope that there is no doubt about whether this was an approved loan. It was approved, however inconsistent with Government environmental policy.

I should like to cite an extract from the British overseas aid 1990 annual review, which sets out the Government objectives abroad and thus shows how the inconsistency arises:

> "One of the ODA's main objectives is to help promote sustainable development in developing countries. That means looking hard at the environmental impact of our projects and funding activities specifically designed to protect the environment."

There follows a list of recent developments, and the document states that the ODA now issues

"a manual on the economics of environmental appraisal".

Later, the section dealing with forestry states:

> "We are continuing to work closely with and finance forestry projects run by Non-Governmental Organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature and Oxfam . . . We are also funding more than 20 forestry research projects and forestry issues are an important aspect of our economic and social research programme."

So there is no doubt that the Government have the expertise in the Overseas Development Administration to assess and evaluate forestry schemes overseas or that the ODA knows how to appraise them economically and environmentally, because it carries out such work for itself. But it appears that the ODA does not influence the authorising of loans by the ECGD.

I hope that the Minister will agree that it is not enough to say that this is a private sector matter and that all the Government have to do is back the money. I hope that he will agree that the Government have an environmental responsibility too. An individual company, the Bank of

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Scotland in this case, may not be able to make the sort of assessments that the Government have the expertise to carry out.

My second example relates to a counter-trade deal. The same aspects show up in it as in the first. This concerns Liberia, and the case attracted a certain notoriety. In 1989, United Scientific Instruments agreed a £20 million arms deal with former President Doe of Liberia. The supply of arms was to be paid for by giving USI permission to log three areas of Liberian rain forest for five years. The World Wide Fund for Nature estimates that felling on that scale would have resulted in the destruction of rain forest of about the size of Greater London—350,000 acres. Because the deal had to do with arms exports and involved counter trade including arms exports, it required an export licence from the United Kingdom Government. The company did not seek insurance from the ECGD because it had arranged its own in the form of the counter-trade activity in Liberia. Liberia was to provide the guarantee of a flagging fee. We all know that the first thing that people learn about Liberia is that it has more ships flying flags of convenience than any other nation. I understand that the exchange guaranteed the right to have more such ships.

I understand that, before granting the licence, the Department of Trade and Industry spoke to the British consul in Liberia and the Ministry of Defence before the licence was agreed. As far as I am aware no environmental assessment is carried out before any such licence is signed on behalf of the Government. The deal did not go through because political instability in Liberia was such that United Scientific Instruments did not pursue it. As we all know, President Doe was thrown out of office and his regime came to an end. The express view of the Department of Trade and Industry appears to be that this was a perfectly satisfactory and sound arrangment and one that was not discouraged or qualified. In fact the deal was never executed.

But the question arises, how could three Departments give the go-ahead for a deal that involved selling arms from Britain in exchange for rain forests in Africa, in clear contravention of what seem to be clear Government aims in relation to developing countries and our policy in relation to the world's rain forests?

We can all make value judgments about the appropriateness of the arms deal, which was significant. I understand that the arrangement, had it gone through, was for the sale of 10 Scorpion armoured fighting vehicles representing £15·25 million worth of business, a new radio communications system valued at £1·5 million, and a training deal under which Liberian students of weaponry and communications would come here to be trained and we would supply service engineers and freight transport to Liberia at a further cost of £3·5 million. That is a significant international trading deal for a private sector company in Britain.

Obviously, one can make judgments about the Government of Liberia who were willing to lose their rain forests. I do not blame our Government for that decision by the then Government of Liberia, but we did not say that that was unacceptable. I am concerned more about the future than the past. That deal did not go through and in any case it is history, but I am anxious to see Britain secure a system that places an environmental impact assessment on all attempts which involve licences as part of agreements for deals, especially if they are as blatantly controversial as an arms export deal by a United Kingdom company or the Government.

The person in charge of the World Wide Fund for Nature campaign to save the rain forests says that such deals are "ecological terrorism". People take different views on the matter, but it seems to me that if we countenance such deals we are aiders and abetters in the destruction of important environmental heritage that the Government often say they want to support.

I hope that the Minister will give us some assurances on the following points either now or as soon as possible.

While the ECGD remains under Government control, insurance should not be given for deals involving the depletion of natural resources in developing countries. Before the privatisation of the ECGD, a condition of sale should be that the company is bound by law not to give insurance for trading deals that involve the depletion of natural resources, and especially non-renewable natural resources in developing countries. If appropriate and necessary, I shall intervene on Report when the Bill that seeks to privatise the ECGD comes before the House.

What rules and methods does the DTI employ in assessing the environmental consequences of any trading deal, and how do they work? If the DTI is to be in line with ODA policy, would it be prepared to make an environmental assessment of a deal before agreeing to insurance? I hope that the Government will not say that that is not a matter for them. It is a matter for them, because, by the very fact that they authorise and approve of the deal, the Government become aiders and abetters in the deal. The assessment should not be only of economic risk. Does the DTI use and advise others to use the ODA handbook that assesses the environmental impact of projects in developing countries?

I also have some questions on counter-trade deals and export licences. If a similar counter-trade deal to the one proposed with Liberia comes before the Government in future for approval, will they refuse to grant an export licence? In other words, would they refuse to countenance such a sale if the consequence were destruction of important tropical rain forest or any other natural resource abroad? Have the Government refused export licences because they objected to a proposed counter-trade deal on environmental grounds? In other words, is there any precedent for refusing an export licence because the Government do not wish to be associated with the environmental effects of a project?

Is there any environmental assessment process in the agreement for export licences in the interest of counter trade? If we are deficient in these aspects, can we draw up some guidelines, which will be made publicly available within Parliament and outside, for wider use in government and the private sector so that we know the standards that the Government uphold through the DTI and the ODA, and across the whole departmental structure of government?

I hope that I have given clear factual examples to illustrate the problem. I hope that the Minister can be reassuring and tell us that Government policy, if it is not already along those lines, can be adapted so that we never again are guilty of complicity in bad international environmental practice.

2.52 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has raised a large number of questions. His rate of questioning increased rapidly towards the end of his speech, and he has not left me much time in which to reply. He has raised a number of different subjects affecting different countries—counter trade, the ECGD, the environmental implications of ECGD activities and export licensing. He referred to Ghana and Liberia.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for one thing. I do not know whether it was inadvertent, but he mentioned the publicity about the transactions with Liberia. I take it that he was accepting that the publicity was not about events that had actually taken place, and that the facts were not as they were described in the press. If so, I thank him for that.

The House is aware of the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for what are broadly called green issues, but sometimes his enthusiasm is a little impractical. He seemed to confuse aid with trade—two factors that I understood his party to be keen to separate rather than combine. There was also confusion about the role of the ECGD and of the export licensing department.

Let me make clear the position on privatisation of the ECGD. Earlier this week, the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill was given its Second Reading. In the debate, I explained that the role of the ECGD was to provide protection for United Kingdom exporters against the financial risks of selling abroad by providing insurance against all the main commercial and political risks of non-payment and also the political risks attending long-term investments abroad. Cover is provided by the ECGD for the whole spectrum of exports from raw materials sold on cash terms to process plants for which the financial risks can span decades. As I said, in recent years, the ECGD has increasingly operated as two separate businesses, the insurance services group in Cardiff handling short-term credit and the project group in London handling medium-term credit capital goods exports. May I make it quite clear that it is only the insurance services group that is to be privatised. The ECGD will continue to provide project support to British exporters.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not need to be reassured that the Government are very concerned with environmental issues. A large part of my Department's job is to encourage firms to assess all the ways in which their activities have an impact on the environment. However, the lead must come from senior management. One might suppose that a company that was concerned about a particular contract referred to in today's debate had some regrets about what might have happened—but, happily, did not happen—in the case of Liberia. We certainly hope that all firms will respond to environmental issues, whatever their origin.

I have already referred to the ECGD's objectives. Constraints are placed upon it in fulfilling its role, which is financial rather than environmental. While encouraging exports, it is obliged to underwrite risks prudently. When export credits are given in conjunction with concessional aid funding—mixed credits—environmental considerations will be taken into account in the normal development appraisal undertaken by the aid authorities. The Overseas Development Administration always carefully assesses the environmental implications of any aid project.

When it is not mixed credit business, with no aid element involved and the business conducted on commercial repayment terms, environmental considerations do not normally form part of the ECGD's underwriting process. That does not, however, suggest a lack of Government commitment to environmental issues; it is a reflection of the real practical difficulties that would arise if attempts were made to make ECGD a central arm of environmental control.

The problem lies essentially in the difficulty of identifying those goods or components which at first sight might appear entirely uncontroversial but which could be used in a harmful way or could form part of a wider contract whose ultimate purpose was not known. For example, a set of pipes and valves could be used for purposes that were not only innocuous but extremely helpful in the production of medicines and the improvement of water supplies, or they could be used for environmentally harmful purposes. When providing support for the export of such material, it is impossible for the ECGD to determine the end use or the environmental impact.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the Montreal protocol. All the European producers of chlorofluorocarbons and halons have undertaken not to transfer the technology for their production to other countries. That is an important achievement. The 66 parties to the environmental protocol, which became effective in the United Kingdom in January 1989, on substances that deplete the ozone layer have undertaken, under article 4·6 of the protocol, to

"refrain from providing new subsidies, aid, credits, guarantees or insurance programmes for the export to states not party to this protocol of products, equipment, plants or technology that would facilitate the production of controlled substances."

The 66 parties to the protocol are in the process of discussing the implementation of the provision. Certain practical difficulties have been identified. The most obvious is how to determine the use to which materials or machinery might be put. The ECGD, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, is considering the practical measures that might be implemented in the United Kingdom. The ECGD is also consulting its counterparts—the other credit insurance agencies in other countries—to co-ordinate action.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of counter-trade, which is an umbrella term for a range of commercial mechanisms for reciprocal trade. In general terms, counter-trade is sought for one or more of four reasons: to finance trade which a lack of commercial credit or convertible currency would otherwise preclude; to exploit a "buyers' market" position to obtain better terms of trade or similar benefits; to protect or stimulate the output of domestic industries, including agriculture and mineral extraction; and as a reflection of the political and economic policies of importing Governments who seek to plan and balance their overseas trade.

Less-developed countries form the bulk of counter-trading nations. Counter-trade is a characteristic of the trade in such countries. The growth in requests for counter-trade largely reflects the effects on their external trade of the international recession, which resulted in the loss of currency-earning capabilities because of depressed

[Mr. Tim Sainsbury]

commodity markets. Sometimes there is also a desire to improve their access to western markets and industrial know-how.

The ECGD does not provide cover for counter-trade transactions or risks. It can, in principle, consider support for transactions that involve some indirect element of counter trade, but only—I stress the word "only"—where there is an unconditional obligation for the buyer or borrower to pay in money. The ECGD will not insure transactions where payment is dependent on the counter-trade operation. That would give rise to a wide range of risks which would be extremely difficult to assess and quantify and which go far beyond the ECGD's normal underwriting criteria.

Against the background of that assurance about the ECGD, I should like to say that counter-trade is not a mode of trade which the Government would advocate for its own sake, but we recognise that there are situations and markets in which accepting an element of counter-trade can be the only way of securing export orders. It is a matter for the commercial judgment of firms whether the costs and risks involved in a particular deal are merited. The Government offer guidance to exporters but in general are not prepared to become involved in particular counter-trade transactions.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a specific transaction concerning Liberia and the grant of an export licence. I am sure that he has looked at the answers which I gave the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas)—I hope that the House will forgive me if my pronunciation is not as good as it should be. I said:

"ECG has been unable to identify any credit underwritten . . . in 1989 in respect of the export of military equipment to Liberia."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. *151*.]

I can say little more on that point except to confirm that the ECGD did not cover any transactions involving military equipment for Liberia. Any press comments to the contrary were incorrect.

During 1989, the ECGD insured British exports to Liberia, provided that any credit extended to the buyer did not exceed six months and then only on fully secured terms; thus payment must be secured by irrevocable letters of credit conferred by banks outside Liberia which are acceptable to the ECGD. The House will not be surprised to hear that there is virtually no demand for cover for exports to Liberia.

I should like to repeat the Government's concern about environmental matters and our wish that all companies —exporters or otherwise—should take full account of those matters in all their transactions. The ECGD is not involved in counter-trade. It would not, in practice, be practical to expect the ECGD to take account of an environmental assessment in its judgment of whether to provide insurance cover for the hundreds and thousands of transactions over the years——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 28 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Housing Developments

1. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what statutory provisions cover consultations between the electricity industry and a developer prior to new house building developments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): There is no statutory requirement for formal consultation in the relevant electricity or planning legislation.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend aware that new houses throughout the country are being built close to underground cables and overhead wires and without a guarantee of adequate supplies? That happens because there is no statutory requirement to consult the electricity industry. However, there is a statutory requirement to consult the National Rivers Authority before planning permission is granted. Will my hon. Friend say something to my constituents who are regularly plunged into darkness when the local sub-station is overloaded? Too many houses are being built without consultation with the electricity industry with the result that local electricity boards cannot cope despite all their efforts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is sensible for developers to consult the electricity companies before proceeding, to ensure adequacy of supply. But I assure my hon. Friend that the suppliers can levy reasonable charges on developers to recoup the cost of the necessary transmission lines and plant to service new developments. The charges do not fall on my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As it is in new buildings that thermal efficiency is most advantageously applied, why is there no statutory requirement on developers to consult not only electricity suppliers but other energy suppliers to ensure that houses have the maximum energy efficiency?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The energy efficiency requirements for new houses are covered in the building regulations, which were updated and improved in April last year. They should improve the thermal efficiency of new houses by about 20 per cent.

Electricity Privatisation

2. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the level of proceeds of the sale of the 12 regional electricity companies.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): The sale of the 12 regional electricity companies will raise some £8 billion, more than £5 billion from the sale of the shares and almost another £3 billion from the injection of debt into the companies.

Mr. Squire: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the high level of those figures is significant and reflects the great success of all those involved in what was a difficult flotation? In view of that large sum, will he suggest to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that at least some of the money could be spent advantageously on energy efficiency schemes both on their own merits and as a way of meeting global warming problems?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend about the success of the sale. Privatisation in itself has several advantages for energy efficiency. First, the Electricity Act 1989, under which the companies were privatised, places an obligation on them to promote energy efficiency. Secondly, the creation of competition and a downward pressure on fuel prices should substantially improve energy efficiency. My ministerial committee, set up as a result of the Government's environmental White Paper, is pursuing many other avenues of energy efficiency.

Dr. Kim Howells: Is the Secretary of State aware that a large tranche of shares in South Wales Electricity was bought by the Welsh water authority and that, given the way things are going with the sale of the regional electricity companies, we are liable to end up with Wales plc, which cannot be a vast improvement on the monopolies that preceded privatisation?

Mr. Wakeham: Of course, the sale of the shares took place after the companies were put into the private sector. All the regulations were drawn up in accordance with stock exchange rules. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a golden share operates in the company. It would not be right for me to say anything further at this stage.

Mr. Morgan: Even before the Government have received most of the proceeds of the sale of the regional electricity companies, we are once more being softened up by the aerial bombardment of "Star Trek" before the land invasion of the generating companies begins with the production of the pathfinder prospectus on Friday. Will the Secretary of State confirm that one thing that he has learnt from the disaster of the sale of the electricity distribution companies is that if one keeps back 40 per cent. and underprices 60 per cent., one has some hope of making up some of that underpricing two years later when one sells the remaining 40 per cent?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is an observer of the scene, but not a wholly dispassionate one. I do not accept his strictures on the sale of the regional electricity companies. I do not accept that they were underpriced or that the sale of the generating companies will be underpriced. We shall take proper care to ensure that the price struck is fair to taxpayers and investors. Naturally, the fact that we are selling only 60 per cent. rather than 100 per cent. will have to be taken into account.

Oil Exploration

3. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the progress of the 12th round of offshore licensing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I am delighted to say that we have received 115 applications covering 81 blocks in the 12th round of licensing. In addition, 37 companies have applied for acreage covering a further 66 blocks in the separate frontier round for the difficult areas north and west of the Shetland islands.

Sir Anthony Durant: Will my hon. Friend welcome the co-operation between the Government and private enterprise on this venture in the North sea? What would be the effects if the interventionist policies of the Labour Opposition were put into effect in the North sea?

Mr. Moynihan: This is my hon. Friend's first question since his knighthood and I am sure that the whole House will wish to congratulate him. It is undoubtedly true that a stable, fiscal regime, predictable and well-established criteria for licensing and an oil and gas market that maximises private sector investment are the keys to economic success. Some of the interventionism in the oil and gas market which the Labour party has made it clear that it would deploy would be counterproductive to the success record of the 1980s continuing into the 1990s.

Dr. Godman: Our interventionist policies concerning the safety of men and women who work on rigs and platforms are far superior to those that the Government put into practice.

On the licence negotiations, must not companies satisfy the Government about the environmental impact of their work? If so, could not the Government institute some of the recommendations in Cullen at this stage of the negotiations—for example, recommendation No. 17 on page 390 of the Cullen report which talks about the need to implement safety regulations and goal-setting objectives? Why do not the Government introduce some of those recommendations now?

Mr. Moynihan: First, there is no question about the Government's commitment to implementing measures that will enhance safety in the North sea. The Government have been quick to respond fully to the Cullen report and to make it clear that safety is the No. 1 priority and that the recommendations will be implemented in full.

If the hon. Gentleman connects his specific point with his first point about interventionism, he will note that Lord Cullen recognised that it was vital that private sector operators should provide a safety case for each platform and should set up a safety audit and that, working with our outstanding inspectorate, they should have the assistance of the public sector to ensure that we enhance safety in the North sea.

As for environmentally sensitive blocks, the operators in the licensing round who wish to develop those quadrants must ensure that their environmental case is sound and persuade my colleagues in the Department and Ministers that that is the case.

Gulf War (Ecological Consequences)

4. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make available the detailed evidence on which he dismissed the scientific warnings given by Professor Paul Crutzen, head of the atmospherics physics department of the Max Planck Institute in Mainz, and Dr. Abdullah Toucan of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, principal scientific adviser to King Hussein of Jordan, about the carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, hydrocarbon and photo-chemical smog results of the war in the middle east; and if he will place his detailed technical evidence in the Library.

Mr. Wakeham: I did not dismiss the warnings of possible fires at Kuwaiti oil fields or criticise particular scientists, but I thought it right to make available the advice that I received on the environmental implications of such fires. That has been followed up by a study by the Meteorological Office which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Since then Saddam Hussein has set on the course of deliberately polluting the waters of the Gulf, which is a gross act of environmental terrorism, and I believe that the whole civilised world will deplore that action. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making a statement about it later this afternoon.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State put the detailed evidence that he had from his Department in the Library? Is not it the case that the Government cannot say that they were not warned of the pumping of oil into the water to which the right hon. Gentleman referred? During the Consolidated Fund debate on 19 December, at column 403, I spoke for 55 minutes and gave a specific warning. Surely it is negligent of Ministers not to have taken precautions. As a senior member of the War Cabinet, will the Secretary of State consider the activities and the frivolous answers from that silly little boy, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), who masquerades as a Minister of State at the Foreign Office——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is spoiling his question.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that these matters deserve more serious treatment than the hon. Gentleman appears to be giving them. I am sure that no one has ever underestimated the possibility of serious environmental terrorism. In the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I made accessible the best advice available to me on the environmental consequences. The report of the Meteorological Office has been put in the Library.

It is absolutely clear that the fact that Saddam Hussein is capable of environmental terrorism of this kind——

Mr. Dalyell: The Government were warned, but did nothing. Why did not the Government do anything?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government were well aware of the threat. The fact that Saddam Hussein is capable of such environmental terrorism shows, once again, how essential it is that Kuwait should be freed from his grasp. It is because of that man that we have taken our action.

Dr. Michael Clark: Does my right hon. Friend know whether Saddam Hussein was given such warnings and information about environmental pollution? Does he

know whether Saddam Hussein submitted himself to questions on this matter in the Iraqi Parliament? What evidence exists to show that Saddam Hussein took notice of those warnings or the concern of his parliamentary colleagues?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes his point well. I add only that Saddam Hussein is well aware of the damage that he is doing to the world. That is why his actions are even more criminal than they would be if he were ignorant of such matters.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As the right hon. Gentleman represents his Department in the War Cabinet, can he tell the House what advice and consultations he and his colleagues have had with European Community Commissioners and Ministers and the United Nations Environment Programme so that the full implications of the environmental risk in the middle east is at all times in the forefront of not only politicians' minds, but those of the military?

Mr. Wakeham: There have been discussions and consultations among the allies, as well as wider discussions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will come to the House at 3.30 to make a proper statement.

Domestic Heating

5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will evaluate the respective cost of house heating by gas, electricity and oil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The cost of heating a house will vary according to the size and type of dwelling, the level of insulation, the comfort level required and the type of heating and fuel used. But the weekly cost of heating an average three-bedroom house by gas, electricity and solid fuel has been estimated at £10·25, £15·50 and £12·10 respectively.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for those figures, which will be helpful to people seeking to find the best way in which to heat their homes. Will my hon. Friend take steps to make better information available to people who need to make such decisions as there is precious little current information about?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree with my hon. Friend about the need to give accurate advice on this matter. He will be pleased to know that the new home energy efficiency scheme, which gives grants to low-income households, provides advice of this nature. We also have a new campaign to give information to those improving their houses or moving house, backed up by leaflets available from my Department. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend is sent a copy.

Mr. Pike: Although these measures are welcome, will the Minister ensure that bodies selling heating appliances explain their thermal efficiency and running costs in a way that is understandable to the person buying them—because much of the official language that is used is not understandable to the purchaser?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are pursuing the idea of an energy labelling scheme for such appliances. Clearly we should like it to be compatible with schemes being worked up in other European countries so as to promote free trade too.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the new building regulations, we are still light years behind our European colleagues? Would not it be better if the Government legislated to stop the building of new houses with single-glazed windows and inadequate insulation, so that people would have cheaper bills irrespective of whether they were for oil, gas or electricity? That would stop the present position, which is nonsensical in this modern day and age.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Our building regulations compare favourably with those of other European countries, but I agree about the need to improve the thermal efficiency of new houses. In April last year we improved the building regulations and raised standards. We shall see how that goes down generally and then consider the possibility of further improving the regulations in the next round.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Minister aware that in the judgment of Sheikh Yamani the interruption of supplies of oil from Iraq and Kuwait need not have—indeed, has not had—a major impact on the world's supply of oil? Does he therefore agree that the major fluctuations in the price of oil since the start of the Gulf crisis represent exploitation of that crisis for profit by the major oil companies? Will he conduct an urgent investigation into those activities?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the oil market; but I can confirm that oil stocks remain generally high.

British Coal

6. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the annual average increase in British Coal's productivity between 1961 and 1979, and between 1979 and 1989.

8. **Mr. Knowles:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the annual average increase in British Coal's productivity between 1961 and 1979, and between 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Wakeham: The average annual increase in the corporation's productivity between 1961 and 1978-79 was 2·5 per cent., and the average annual increase between 1978-79 and 1988-89 was 6·3 per cent.

Mr. Batiste: Given the outstanding improvement in performance that my right hon. Friend has just described, does he agree that the single greatest constraint within which British Coal must still operate is the fact that it is in the public sector? Does he agree with the new year resolution expressed by Mr. Malcolm Edwards, commercial director of British Coal, that he will seek at the earliest opportunity the separation of the coal industry from the machinery of government so that its managers can concentrate on the interests of that industry alone?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with both points. There has been a significant improvement in British Coal's productivity, for which I pay tribute to it, but that productivity must continue to improve if British Coal is to hold its own in a competitive market.

I agree that the privatisation of British Coal is a desirable objective; it is a commitment of the Government and it will be done in the next Parliament.

Mr. Knowles: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, even so, in the lifetime of this Government British Coal's productivity has been almost double that of the previous two decades?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, certainly. British Coal's productivity is up 85 per cent. on pre-strike levels, which is excellent progress. It recently achieved an impressive weekly record output of just over 5 tonnes per man shift.

Mr. Allen McKay: Does the Secretary of State agree that output per man shift depends on the number employed, and that the figure has increased only because of the number of miners who have been made redundant? As to privatisation, will the Minister assure the House and people outside it that in the unwelcome event of British Coal's being privatised, existing arrangements for concessionary fuel supplies or cash in lieu will remain in force?

Mr. Wakeham: It is not for me to speculate about the privatisation that will occur during the next Parliament. All obligations to employees will be a proper matter for consideration at the appropriate time.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Secretary of State accept that the Government are behaving in a stupid and irresponsible manner by not having a national energy plan? There is no point in increasing production if market forces are to dictate the amount of coal that the country produces. If it is left to market forces, we shall not meet the needs of the British people.

Mr. Wakeham: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. The best way to meet the energy requirements of the nation and of the world is to encourage diversity of supply and that is the basis of the British plan.

Mr. Barron: Does the Secretary of State accept that any further loss of contracts between British Coal and the generators after 1993 will be viewed as a very poor reward for the miners who have increased productivity in recent years? What action are the Government taking to stop the dumping of foreign coal in Britain, in the interests of not only British Coal but the nation?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government have done more than any other to assist the industry by giving it financial support, and for the first time ever British Coal has long-term contracts with its customers, the generators. It therefore has the best opportunity of securing further long-term contracts, and it will do so because it has the potential to be the supplier of choice. That is the best way of securing the industry's long-term future.

North Sea Oil and Gas

7. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on North sea oil and gas developments presently under consideration by his Department.

Mr. Moynihan: Draft plans for 11 new or incremental oil and gas development projects in the North sea are currently under detailed consideration by my Department.

Mrs. Ewing: Given the extent of the developments to which the Minister referred, is his Department taking steps to ensure that contracts for the steel pipelines and production and exploration platforms required will be allocated to domestic steel mills? In particular, did the Department establish any contact with the Scottish Development Agency when it prepared its report on the future of Ravenscraig, Clydesdale and Dalzell, when the agency could have pointed out the potential contracts that would arise from the new developments?

Mr. Moynihan: In the marketplace, suppliers will win contracts only if they deliver top-quality products within specification and on time. The capability to undertake work for the pipeline to which the hon. Lady refers does not exist in the United Kingdom at present because of the quality and thickness of pipes required. On the positive side, I assure the hon. Lady that all three jackets under consideration for Everest, Lomond and the separate riser platform have been awarded to Highland Fabricators. Of course, we take note of the success, or otherwise, of United Kingdom suppliers in that sector.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: As oil and gas sources are finite and should be conserved, can my hon. Friend the Minister comment on the Government's support and hopes for the future of converting coal into fuel oil? I refer particularly to the Point of Ayr project, which I and a number of my hon. Friends visited last Friday.

Mr. Moynihan: On the second point, I am sorry that I was not with my hon. Friend when he made his visit and I shall follow that up in writing. On the first point, my hon. Friend is right to refer to the importance of a sensitive and sensible policy when it comes to the depletion of oil and gas reservoirs. In that context, we pay special care to ensure that the licence rounds, which have been taking place on average every two years in the offshore oil and gas sector, reflect the need for a sensible depletion policy in the long term.

Alternative Energy

9. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his Department's investment in alternative sources of energy.

Mr. Moynihan: Energy paper 55 "Renewable Energy in the UK: The Way Forward" set out my Department's strategy for the development of renewable energy sources. My Department's provision for research and development into renewable energy for this financial year is £20·3 million. This is due to increase by 20 per cent. in the next financial year.

Mr. Burns: May I thank my hon. Friend for that answer? Would I be right in saying that, rather than simply mouthing platitudes about the need for renewable energy, his Department has provided the expenditure, which has doubled during the past 12 years, to ensure that we meet that challenge?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. More than simply highlighting the importance of research and development, in which we have invested, my hon. Friend will be aware that we achieved a first by establishing a marketplace, through the non-fossil fuel obligation, to allow renewable projects which are both

environmentally acceptable and economically competitive to come on stream. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend welcomes the fact that 75 such projects were eligible in the first NFFO tranche and we hope that many more will be successful in the years to come in future tranches.

Mr. Mullin: Is not the truth that, historically, the hon. Gentleman's Department has been as deeply in hock to the nuclear industry as the Department of Transport has been in hock to the road lobby? Will the Minister give us an assurance that he has now established with civil servants that they should take a serious and long-term interest in alternative sources of energy, and not sit around working out ways to sabotage research on the subject?

Mr. Moynihan: I reject the hon. Gentleman's last comment, but I welcome the fact that he recognises that the Government have a clear commitment to ensure that renewable energy sources come on stream and that they must be environmentally acceptable, as well as economically competitive.

Mr. Mullin: What about Salter's duck?

Mr. Moynihan: From a sedentary position the hon. Gentleman refers to Salter's ducks. I am sure that, like me, he will welcome the fact that both parties have accepted that an independent review should be undertaken. Its findings will be carefully considered. The Government do not wish to put any hindrance in the way of renewable technology that can come on stream and is commercially competitive, as well as environmentally beneficial.

Mr. Rost: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the best way that he can further help renewables is by increasing the number of power generation projects that he sanctions in the second tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation, especially waste incineration into energy projects, which will also help the environment?

Mr. Moynihan: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I very much hope that, across the range of renewable energy technologies, many projects will come forward in the second tranche of the NFFO and that they can meet the criteria. The more projects that come forward, the more they will be welcomed by the Government.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister agree that if we wasted less energy in Britain we would depend less on imported fuel from the Gulf and other insecure sources of supply? Will he make it a top priority to save energy, to develop alternative sources and to use coal, oil and gas produced here in Britain? To that end, will he instruct the generating companies to abandon their preposterous plans to import more oil, gas and coal and will he make them concentrate instead on energy saving rather than energy sales?

Mr. Moynihan: I am always pleased to agree with the hon. Gentleman when it comes to energy matters, especially on energy efficiency and energy-saving policies, and to that end I agree with the thrust of his remarks. As regards oil and gas, of course we should like increased production and we should like to ensure that we do not need to become an importer. However the reality, which I know that he accepts, is that in recent months production has had to be restrained, despite world demand for increased production before the Gulf crisis, because of the importance of safety and of ensuring that topside emergency shutdown valves are in place. Safety has been the top priority and that is the reason why production has not been at the highest possible level, as we should have liked.

Mr. Butler: Will my hon. Friend summarise the current state of the Mersey barrage project?

Mr. Moynihan: The Mersey Barrage Company reported to me last week. That report explained further the extensive discussions in which the company had engaged to analyse cost-benefit assessments in each Government Department as a result of meetings that it had held with those Departments. A further meeting will take place before Easter. We shall then assess the economic feasibility of the project, as well as the detailed scientific research that has accompanied it. Our aim is to give it as much support as possible, as long as it is commercially viable and meets all the important environmental criteria.

Oil Exploration

11. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many exploration and appraisal wells were drilled on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

Mr. Moynihan: During 1990, 224 exploration and appraisal wells were started on the United Kingdom continental shelf. This is the first time since UKCS activity began that drilling in a single year has exceeded 200 wells.

Mr. Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a remarkable figure? Can he confirm that it is the highest since North sea exploration began back in 1964, and will he also confirm that the only threat to this expansion comes from the prospect of a Labour Government, who might again start intervening in the North sea with state-run corporations and set back the magnificent achievements of 1990?

Mr. Moynihan: I entirely accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's argument—not least because the success that led to what he rightly described as the highest number of exploration well starts since the 1984 record of 109 is evidence of continuing confidence in the United Kingdom continental shelf. That confidence is wholly dependent on a stable fiscal regime, a comprehensive licensing regime and the opportunity for the private sector to excel where it excels best—in the marketplace for the development of oil and gas within the UKCS, and in exports. Any interventionism or return to state-owned control would be extremely damaging to that success story.

Mr. Dobson: If the Minister thinks that the Tories' record in the North sea is such a wonderful success, how does he explain the fact that, last year and the year before, we were net importers of fuel?

Mr. Moynihan: First, we were not net importers in cash terms. Secondly, as I have already told the hon. Gentleman—I am surprised that he did not take the point in my response to his last question—safety considerations had to lead to shutdowns and to working conditions for production that were less than optimal for maximum recovery. An example is the present need to handle dead rather than live crude. It was vital that Lord Cullen's recommendations be implemented as matter of urgency, and that the all-party agreement on topside valves be put in place, even if that meant that production would not

reach the levels that the hon. Gentleman would have liked. I am surprised that he does not know the answer to his own question.

Mr. Moss: Will my hon. Friend confirm that last year was the first year of about six in which this country was a net importer of energy?

Mr. Moynihan: Let me reinforce what I said to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). We were not a net importer in cash terms: furthermore, given the total activity on the UKCS, there is no doubt that we can and will increase production. Our net position will not be under threat once the essential safety work is completed. We shall then have not only high levels of production, but a safer North sea in which to operate.

Energy Conservation

12. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the Government's policy for energy conservation.

Mr. Wakeham: We continue to promote the adoption of cost-effective energy efficiency measures through a range of programmes and other services offered by the Energy Efficiency Office. A number of new initiatives, including the ministerial group on energy efficiency, were announced in the White Paper on the environment and we are now working to carry these forward.

Ms. Primarolo: Is the Secretary of State aware that an estimated 6·6 million households suffer from fuel poverty as a result of inefficient fuel heating systems? Does he agree that the lessons learnt from the Gulf crisis and war and the fight over oil, combined with this Government's inefficient approach to energy conservation, mean that a national programme for energy conservation and energy use is urgently required if we are to address the country's energy problems?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree this far with the hon. Lady—that there is a continuing need for greater energy efficiency. We estimate that about 20 per cent. of all the energy used in this country is wasted. However, we have made some progress. During the last 10 years gross domestic product has increased by 25 per cent. while our energy consumption has remained virtually unchanged. Both commercial and domestic energy efficiency are important. That is why the Government have introduced a home energy efficiency scheme. Grants are provided for basic insulation measures and advice is available for low-income households. We have built on the success of the community insulation project that led to the insulation of about 850,000 low-income homes.

THE ARTS

Welsh National Opera

28. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received on its financial position from Welsh National Opera.

33. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the future funding of the Welsh National Opera.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): I have received a large number of representations on behalf of Welsh National Opera. Helpful discussions have taken place between the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Welsh Arts Council and the Welsh National Opera, together with a further detailed review of the company's financial position and planned touring commitments in England. I am informed that at its meeting on 30 January the Arts Council of Great Britain will consider a recommended increase in its grant to the Welsh National Opera of between £200,000 and £300,000 in 1991-92 and the two subsequent years.

Mr. Maclennan: Although I recognise that enhancement fund expenditure is primarily a matter for the Arts Council, does the Minister accept that when it was set up it was recognised that Ministers would be interested in how the money was spent? The Welsh National Opera's quality is appreciated far beyond the bounds of the Principality and particularly in the midlands, where its excellence is widely acknowledged. Would the Minister regard it as an infringement of the arm's-length principle if he were to add his personal approval of the Welsh National Opera's work? Is he happy about the progress of the discussions to which he alluded? I was pleased to hear that a substantial increase in the WNO's grant is being considered.

Mr. Renton: Yes, of course I am delighted to endorse the artistic quality, repertoire and singing of the Welsh National Opera. I approve and endorse the general criteria under which allocations are made from the enhancement fund. However, the individual allocations are traditionally an Arts Council responsibility. The hon. Gentleman may have forgotten that the Welsh National Opera received £175,000 from the Welsh Arts Council's part of the enhancement fund. At the Art Council's meeting next Wednesday a decision will be taken on whether to increase further the Welsh National Opera's touring grant.

Mr. Michael: I welcome the Minister's positive response and also the endorsement of the Welsh National Opera by Scotland as well as by England. Does the Minister agree that it is important that the limited budget available to the Welsh Arts Council for other aspects of the arts in Wales should not be eroded to meet the Welsh National Opera's shortfall? Does he also agree that we hope his answer means that there will be a positive outcome for the Welsh National Opera without any such erosion, which would threaten the other arts in Wales?

Mr. Renton: I do not want the other arts in Wales to be threatened. The Welsh Arts Council received about £750,000 from the enhancement fund. If it has decided that part of that money should be given to WNO, essentially for its work in Wales, that is a perfectly proper decision for it to take. I remind the hon. Gentleman that WNO is receiving a general increase of more than 8 per cent. in its grant for the year ahead and a 11·5 per cent. increase in its touring grant—in addition to the sum that the Arts Council will consider this Wednesday. On that basis, the hon. Gentleman, who has campaigned actively on this matter, should not cry foul too often.

Mr. Cormack: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks. Will he convey the views that have been expressed this afternoon to the chairman of the Arts Council and tell him that there would be widespread

disappointment not only in the Principality but throughout this country if this excellent company had to close? We all expect—*[Interruption]*—or at least, most outside Hayes and Harlington expect, the Arts Council to do the right thing on Wednesday.

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his support, which does not surprise me. I understand what he means about the widespread support for the WNO. Even the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is not in his seat today, put his name to an early-day motion confirming, I think, "the brilliance of the singing and repertoire of the WNO". That shows that, although that Bench below the Gangway is empty this afternoon, the WNO's message has reached far in the land.

Mr. Dicks: Many people in this country will still wonder why this subsidy from public funds is going to these organisations, wonderful though they may be. Will he tell the people of this country that he is thinking twice about the amount of money that is given to the arts from public funds—an amount that is increased per annum?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. Perhaps he might like to get in touch with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and have a good discussion on the subject. Generally, I am told that not enough money is being given to the arts. In successive public expenditure rounds, both my predecessors managed to obtain settlements in excess of the rate of inflation.

Mr. Dicks: Shame.

Mr. Renton: As in opera, it is always helpful to have someone crying "Shame" from the gallery. It reminds one that there is another voice.

Mr. Fisher: I welcome the Minister's statement, which appears to resolve the Welsh National Opera crisis—that should never have been allowed to happen in the first place—and his assurance that that money will not be given at the expense of other Welsh Arts Council clients. But will he explain, first, whether his office will contribute money directly to the settlement and, secondly, whether the other companies that received a cash standstill budget or a cut of 9 per cent. in real terms—the Bristol Old Vic, the Lyric, Hammersmith, the Black Theatre Forum, the Three Choirs festival, the Eastern Orchestral Board, the Liverpool Playhouse and the Everyman theatre—will receive the same just settlement as Welsh National Opera?

Mr. Renton: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads an article written by Ian Brown, the drama director of the Arts Council, in last week's edition of *The Stage*. It is headed, "Keep Calm in a Crisis"—a message that the hon. Member might learn to advantage. He says that it is not the Arts Council's job to come to the rescue willy-nilly of every provincial theatre that gets into trouble, no matter whether it has put on the right programme for its customers or whether it is receiving local authority support. That message must be taken on board throughout the country. The settlement to WNO does not mean any direct money from my office.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's comment that this should never have happened in the first place. The Arts Council, rightly, has again crawled over the touring plans of WNO and has reached the conclusion that it should try to make a little more money available—a lot more money available—if that is what its council agrees on Wednesday.

Arts Funding, Scotland

29. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met members of the Scottish Arts Council to discuss funding for the arts.

Mr. Renton: I had a meeting with the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council, Sir Alan Peacock, on 11 December.

Dr. Godman: My question concerns a subject which was close to the heart of my late dear friend Norman Buchan. Will the Minister discuss with the Secretary of State for Scotland how public-sector support might be provided in respect of those crafts that will be denied support from the "Design by Scotland" agency which is to be set up in April? It should be pointed out that, south of the border, support is provided in respect of identical crafts. All that I seek is parity of support for Scots craftsmen and craftswomen.

Mr. Renton: I am very interested in which the hon. Gentleman has just said. Indeed, if he feels that crafts in Scotland are not being supported where comparable crafts in England are, and if he writes to me giving the details—and provides my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland with a copy of his letter—I shall be very happy to look into the problem with a view to finding out the reason for it.

Dr. Blackburn: Will my right hon. Friend, particularly in the context of these questions, reflect on a most important issue? I refer to the rolling programme of funding that was introduced by his predecessor, which received the full acclamation of the arts world. I hope that my right hon. Friend shares my view that ministerial intervention in the funding of the arts would be quite wrong, particularly in Scotland.

Mr. Renton: I am not quite sure whether my hon. Friend means that as a rebuke. He is such a kindly man that I think it hardly likely. Like him, I was, of course, delighted when my predecessor set up the rolling programme. One of the difficulties is that some of our clients do not think that the inflation expectation is realistic. Certainly the rolling programme is set in concrete for the time being, and it would be quite wrong for me to try to disturb it.

CIVIL SERVICE

Ethnic Monitoring

38. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will make a statement regarding the progress of his Department's ethnic monitoring policy.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): All Departments and agencies, including my own Department, are implementing the programme for action on race, which incorporates ethnic monitoring.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister agree, as his predecessor so clearly did, that it is unacceptable that so few people from ethnic minorities reach the higher echelons of the civil service? Will he please undertake, as his predecessor

so rightly did, to make the most energetic efforts to ensure that the policy is not just something on paper—but that it is implemented?

Mr. Renton: This matter is very close to the heart of the hon. and learned Gentleman. It is true that black and Asian people are under-represented at senior level across the civil service, including my own Department. We wish to increase equality of opportunity, but, as the hon. and learned Gentleman will agree, it is most important that those who reach the higher grade should do so on the basis of merit and not because of their sex or their ethnic background. We hope that, by virtue of the programme of action that we published recently, every Department will have been reminded of the need to give ethnic minorities every possible opportunity to reach the higher grades if that is what they merit.

Mr. Soames: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the United States of America positive discrimination of the kind advocated by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) has proved to be a total disaster? Does he agree that it would be quite improper, and totally against the interests of the very high-quality civil service that we have in this country, to allow promotion on any basis other than merit?

Mr. Renton: I hesitate to come between my hon. Friend, who is also a Sussex neighbour, and the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). Of course, my hon. Friend is right in suggesting that positive discrimination in favour of people of a particular colour or sex would be wrong. What we seek to achieve is equality of opportunity—in simple terms, that the best available person, regardless of skin colour or sex, should get to the top.

Terrorism

40. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what representations he has had from the civil service trade unions about the problems posed by potential terrorism originating in the middle east for civil service installations in Britain.

Mr. Renton: None, Sir.

Mr. Dalyell: What extra money has been allocated for the defence of such installations? What help will be given to airlines? Some are reeling from the change in the number of passengers they carry, to the extent that they have had to cut back on the orange juice and second cups of tea and coffee that they give passengers for breakfast. That is the position of the airlines and it has been graphically illustrated.

Mr. Renton: I do not think that questions about the number of orange juices or cups of coffee comes under the province of my Department in any sense. Mine is a strange Department—a duet between the civil service and the arts—but it is not as strange as that. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to ask about the costs of the installations, he must refer such questions to either my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will make a statement in a few minutes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be more convenient for the civil service unions and Ministers if people did not drop chemicals on the Kurds, did not go to war with Iran, at a cost of 1 million Muslim lives, and did not start taking over other independent states such as Kuwait?

Mr. Renton: Although that is not within the province of my Department, I can without hesitation say yes to all my hon. Friend's propositions.

Dr. Godman: Installations in Scotland require the same protection as that given in England and Wales. I do not make this point out of parochialism. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the appallingly dreadful terrorist organisation, the Irish Republican Army, does not carry out terrorist activities in Scotland; hence some installations there may be regarded as soft targets.

Mr. Renton: I listen with great care to the hon. Gentleman. Precautions are in place to protect civil servants, no matter where they are based in the United Kingdom, against the current threat of terrorist attack. That applies whether they are in Scotland or in England or whether the terrorist attacks are by the IRA or by other organisations.

Executive Agencies

41. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he has any plans to create more "next steps" agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The "next steps" initiative continues to make excellent progress; 34 agencies have now been established, and we expect that number to rise to 50 by this summer. By the end of the year we expect "next steps" will apply to about half the civil service.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend has made great efforts to achieve this progress, whereby half the civil service will be involved in "next steps" agencies. That is welcome. Most Conservative Members would welcome management of Government services according to private sector discipline. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that it is important that many of these agencies are placed in parts of the country other than the south-east, particularly in areas where unemployment is high? Will he do all that he can to achieve that target?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his opening remarks and I fully agree with the second half of his comments. We have a vigorous programme for relocating civil service departments, whether they are moving into agencies or not, in other parts of the country. I was involved in that when I was a Home Office Minister and I shall aim for its continuation while I have my present responsibilities.

Dr. Marek: When I asked the Minister a question three weeks ago, he answered me courteously, but he answered a completely different question. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to concentrate his mind and to let the House know whether he will meet representatives of the civil service unions to discuss the morale and finance problems in the present lacklustre housing market of civil servants who have been compulsorarily relocated because these "next steps" agencies have been set up.

Mr. Renton: If the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) had turned up this afternoon, I would

have specifically answered that question. Of course, I should be delighted to meet leaders of the civil service trade unions at the appropriate time if they wish to see me. I have already met certain representatives of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists. I shall continue to meet such representatives at the appropriate moments when we have something to discuss.

42. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on progress under the Government's "next steps" agencies initiative.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

Mr. Butler: Will any of the "next steps" agencies be relocated to Warrington or Runcorn?

Mr. Renton: At this stage, I can tell my hon. Friend only that the Liverpool passport office is trying out team-working arrangements which may lead to an increase in the number of staff at that office, that the resettlement agency, working with Knowsley council, is developing alternative hostel facilities and that Companies House has opened a satellite office in Manchester. All those developments are very close to the area in which my hon. Friend is interested and I hope that there will be further developments.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would not "next steps" status be better for the transport section of the Crown Suppliers? Will the Minister assure me that that section will not be sold to a civil servant who has been the subject of a full investigation by the Crown Suppliers and who has been found to have committed three disciplinary offences? Can the right hon. Gentleman assure me that that person will not be allowed to buy the transport section of the Crown Suppliers?

Mr. Renton: If the hon. Gentleman cares to write to me about the matter, I shall see that it is looked into in great detail.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend examine carefully all the agencies that we now have in south Dorset? The Admiralty research establishment is to go into the defence research agency. He should also consider the Atomic Energy Authority, the dockyards and various other developments. Will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that if the organisations are passed over to individual managements, care is taken to ensure that they do not all decide at the same time to relocate 8,000 jobs in two years from the very small Weymouth and Portsmouth area? I should be most grateful if my right hon. Friend would examine that matter carefully.

Mr. Renton: I fully understand my hon. Friend's point, and it is a good point. Naturally, he does not want a lot of employment to move out of his area quickly and all in one go. In my experience, relocation in the civil service does not exactly happen overnight. It happens over a great many years, allowing plenty of time for the local Member of Parliament to make full representations about the effect of relocation on his constituency. I hope that, with his customary assiduity, my hon. Friend would do that if there were any likelihood of all the civil service departments or agencies moving in one go.

The Gulf (Oil Pollution)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): Mr. Speaker, with permission I will make a statement about the United Kingdom response to the environmental damage taking place in the Gulf.

The oil spill in the Gulf appears to be the largest ever. It is 35 miles long by 10 miles wide. It appears to contain some 8 million barrels of oil and it is moving down the Gulf at 15 to 20 miles per day. Words are inadequate to condemn the callousness and irresponsibility of the action of Saddam Hussein in deliberately unleashing this environmental catastrophe.

There is a threat to desalination plants and fresh water supplies, to birds and other wildlife, to fish, sea mammals and shellfish, and to local communities dependent for their livelihoods on the sea.

With our allies, the United Kingdom is playing a full part in the world's response to this abomination.

First, we must stem the flow of oil. The United States has already acted on this decisively and, we believe and hope, effectively.

Secondly, we must assess the way in which the oil may flow so that we can assess likely consequences. Action is in hand in the Gulf itself to do that. To supplement it, United Kingdom scientific resources are already being mobilised. Existing computer models at the Meteorological Office and Proudman oceanographic laboratory are being urgently adapted to help give the best possible predictions of the likely behaviour of the slick in the Gulf.

Thirdly, we need to assess possible effects on marine life. The United States is already sending experts. The Natural Environment Research Council is co-ordinating urgent work to bring together here in the United Kingdom information that we have on marine life and effects that could be useful in the Gulf.

Fourthly, in common with other countries, the United Kingdom is taking practical steps to help to protect desalination plants and sensitive coastal areas and inlets. The airlift of an initial 70 tonnes of equipment from the stores maintained by the oil industry will go ahead today, with a further flight tomorrow. Further material will be available if needed. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is looking sympathetically at requests that we have received from the Saudi Government for the loan of small numbers of skilled pollution control experts and advisers. We anticipate being able to respond later today. The Department of Transport will meet European Community colleagues tomorrow to consider whether the Community should send in its standing task force of national experts on oil pollution response. We shall be urging strongly that it should do so.

For the longer term, the United Kingdom is considering now how it will be able to help with the clean-up and restoration of the habitats and human settlements affected once it is safe to do so. We are making arrangements to assess and bring together the contribution that United Kingdom bodies outside Government, whether public, private or voluntary, can make.

The first responsibility for dealing with the environmental problems facing the Gulf lies with the Gulf states themselves. We do not yet know what final form the arrangements for co-ordinating their efforts will take: matters are still developing fast. But, whatever they may be, the United Kingdom stands ready to play its full and immediate part. We shall be in touch later today with Saudi Arabia and the other states most closely involved with a first indication of the help that we can offer.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Environment Programme is today announcing its intention to take a lead on improving environmental communications and co-ordinating technical expertise. I have been in touch with UNEP to establish what we can offer by way of expert staff or other help.

On Wednesday, the Environment Ministers of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development meet in Paris. I shall be calling then for all OECD members to respond to this disaster and to take action according to their experience, equipment and skills to offer help to the Gulf states likely to be affected. But there is a wider issue. It is not only war that creates risks. It seems important to recognise the ongoing dangers of environmental calamity which arise from time to time which go way beyond national frontiers.

I mean to raise with OECD colleagues the proposal that we should set up a working party to recommend what more effective preparations we could undertake to cope with these disasters. I have in mind that there should be a register setting out available expertise and available facilities on which affected nations could draw in times of crisis. In this context, we shall be pressing for an early conclusion to the work already in hand in the International Maritime Organisation to put into effect a full-scale international convention on preparedness and response in relation to oil pollution and to set up regional centres to pool resources.

The whole House will be appalled at the environmental damage threatening the Gulf. The Government are determined to do all they reasonably can to assist those faced with the consequences of this outrage. We also intend to inject a new urgency into consideration of the wider issues raised by environmental threats that require co-ordination above the national level.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement and the information that he has provided today. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that any deliberate destruction of the environment, particularly on this scale, is a desperate act which cannot be justified and which could in itself be considered a war crime.

Will the Secretary of State clarify the position with regard to the source of the pollution? It seems clear that the major source of the pollution is the Sea Island oil terminal which has been opened deliberately by the Iraqis. What assessment has been made of any environmental consequences of allied attacks on oil tankers in the area that were reported last week? There has been a great deal of speculation and counter accusation about that point.

The Secretary of State said that expertise and help will be sent from this country. We welcome that, because we have a great deal of high quality and varied expertise, which should be utilised now and when the conflict is ended.

Will the Secretary of State ensure, however, that the technology and advice that are given are appropriate not only to the problem of oil pollution but to the ecosystem in that area? The right hon. Gentleman must be aware that, on occasions, clean-ups can cause more problems. Will the Secretary of State ensure also that the help that we

can give is offered quickly and in advance of any discussions about who should pay for that work? Can the Secretary of State tell us more about the problems of and the potential threat to water supplies in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the area as a result of the crisis?

There is an urgent priority to protect the desalination plants, but we must bear in mind the fact that the toxic components of oil, PAHs—that is, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons—are potentially dangerous in the long term. They can cause cancer and can create a serious hazard. Does the Secretary of State know whether the Government of Saudi Arabia and other areas in the region have the capacity to monitor toxins of that kind? This might be one direct way in which this country could help by providing expertise.

Finally, does the Secretary of State agree that, this weekend, we saw the environment used as a weapon in war by Saddam Hussein and that, whatever the military consequences of that may or may not be, the main victim of the attack has been the environment itself, which leaves every one of us, wherever we may live, much the poorer?

Mr. Heseltine: I thank the hon. Lady very much for the welcome that she has given to what we have said. Our view is that the deliberate decision to open five tankers is responsible for the seepage that has caused such devastation. The second point that the hon. Lady asked me about is whether the solutions that we are applying will preoccupy themselves not only with the oil problems but with the ecosystem of the Gulf. I can give her that assurance. We have significant expertise in this country. That leads me to the hon. Lady's third point, which is whether we will ensure that such help is available quickly. We have made the offers. The expertise that we possess is known, and we shall make it obvious to those who might have recourse to it that that help is available.

On cost, the Saudis have already agreed to pay for the shipment of supplies that is either just about to leave or has already left for the Gulf. My own Department took a small decision to absorb costs within it yesterday, but the broader issues are clear. The environmental threat is the key issue, and the question of apportioning responsibilities for payment will be dealt with as a secondary priority to that, although one cannot lose sight of the matter entirely.

Water supplies in the individual countries concerned are more appropriately a matter for the Governments of those countries. It would not be right for me to try to speculate on how the Saudis or any of the other countries involved feel about the threat to their desalination plants. Monitoring toxins is a matter that comes within what I have already said—in so far as we have expertise, that expertise is available.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): If one adds the unprecedented and deliberate assault on all the peoples—mainly Muslim—living in the Gulf region to the mass murder two years ago of thousands of Iraqi Kurds by the monster Saddam Hussein, and adds to that the deliberate rape and destruction of a small, independent and peaceful state, is it too early to ask that the international community should start to think in terms of bringing that man, if he survives, before an international tribunal so that, for all time, those monstrous crimes should be recognised and abhorred?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that everyone shares my right hon. Friend's indignation at the outrage that has taken place, but it would not be appropriate for me to speculate on the wider issues that he raises.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: May I ask hon. Members to confine their questions to the statement and not to bring in wider issues.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for the British Government's offer to assist in the rescue operation? I also welcome the news that UNEP will take the lead in co-ordinating the international rescue. I am sure that the whole House shares his view that, whatever the dispute over territory and whenever there is a resort to arms, such an attack on the environment is inexcusable and unjustified in all circumstances.

It seems that the immediate concern is that the experts are able to do their jobs efficiently and are protected from injury and death. Could he lead the way to an international agreement that such experts receive the same immunity as the Red Crescent and Red Cross, so that in future we have an international environmental agency which can protect the environment in the same way as the Security Council has sought to protect the peace?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting and important matter, which will undoubtedly be given consideration in the international forums in which such matters are discussed.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the UNEP initiative. Dr. Tolba, the executive director, will issue a statement today explaining his intentions. I understand that a team is to go to the Gulf immediately to seek better communications in the light of the sporadic information about the environment that is available. The team will be headed by a British citizen, Dr. Michael Gwynne, the head of UNEP's global environment monitoring system. Another team of technical experts on oil spills will work particularly closely with the Saudi authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): For the avoidance of doubt, will my right hon. Friend confirm from the Dispatch Box that all the evidence that the Government have suggests that the oil slick is the result of a deliberate act and did not follow from some inadvertent accident resulting from the hostilities? At the forthcoming OECD meeting, will he underline the fact that many of us in Britain expect the fullest co-operation from each of the members of that organisation in this non-military but vital endeavour to save whatever aspects of nature can still be saved?

Mr. Heseltine: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. I repeat that it is our view that five tankers were deliberately opened to cause the spillage. I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend said about the activities that will flow from the OECD meetings. Today I started the process of contacting my colleagues in the organisation with that in mind.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that warnings by King Hussein and others that this would be the inevitable consequence of war made to the Government at the very beginning? Does he accept that it is not convincing to suggest that, when allied

[Mr. Tony Benn]

military planes destroy installations in Iraq, it is a military triumph, but that, when this weapon is used, it is an act of environmental terrorism? Is he not aware that all modern warfare, involving the bombing of civilians, with the casualties that follow, and modern technology, is an organised act of terrorism? Does he agree that the sooner that the war is brought to a conclusion, the sooner lives can be saved and the environment protected?

Mr. Heseltine: Everybody will share the right hon. Gentleman's view that the war should come to an early conclusion. The easy, quick and effective way in which that can happen is for Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces from Kuwait. The House will not lose sight of the fact that the right hon. Gentleman appears to condone the awfulness of what is happening. It is obvious that, unless we are prepared to resist and confront this man, he will have the opportunity to blackmail us with any technique at his disposal.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): May I first thank my right hon. Friend for an admirably swift and comprehensive response to this tragedy? Does he agree that this environmental and vicious act of war by Saddam Hussein is likely to be particularly devastating because the Gulf is an enclosed and shallow sea, in which little self-cleansing by tides and waves is possible? Does he agree that speed is of the essence in the cleaning-up operation, because the huge oil slick must be prevented from turning into even more devastating sludge and foam? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the priority appears to be skimming equipment and nets, particularly in areas of intake for desalination plants?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much support what my hon. Friend has said. The equipment that is on its way from this country includes equipment of that sort. It is indicative of the speed with which we think this matter must be addressed that we have got this process under way as quickly as we possibly can. My hon. Friend is perfectly right to say that the ecosystem of the Gulf does not self-purify with the speed of much deeper, rougher waters. That adds to the urgency of the situation.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is an evil and reckless act by an evil and reckless man. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Can we be told a little more about the effect on the desalination plant? I know that this presents difficulties, but if the right hon. Gentleman could tell us what percentage of the Saudi water supply is potentially at risk if the desalination plants are affected, it would be helpful.

Mr. Heseltine: A high proportion of Saudi water comes through desalination plants, but it would not be appropriate for me, as a Minister in an allied Government, to give indications of the sorts of problems with which the Saudis themselves should most properly deal.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the Isle of Wight leads the world in the manufacture of skimming technology and clean-up equipment, such as the frogmat boom. Can he reassure the House that, if necessary, the troops will be allowed to assist the company on the Isle of Wight to ensure that the equipment is flown directly from Bembridge airport to the Gulf? Can he confirm the Government's position on stockpiling mechanical equipment in future, as we have seen that the ecosystem of the Gulf is so delicate that dispersants cannot be used?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that we would wish to give every facility to the urgent despatch of equipment, if one felt that the narrow, additional number of hours required to move equipment between one airport and another in the United Kingdom was time-critical. My hon. Friend can feel reassured that, before we take a decision about the use of an airport, we shall be satisfied that we are not prejudicing the undertaking to which we are committed by moving equipment to a different airport from the one which he suggested. Stockpiling is, in the first instance, for the coastal states concerned. The broad issue of how much countries are prepared to deploy in resources for this purpose must be for them, but I hear clearly what my hon. Friend has to say.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why is the House of Commons surprised that this dreadful and catastrophic thing has happened? [HON. MEMBERS: "We are not."] Were we not told repeatedly by scientists and, specifically, in c. 403 on 19 December during the Consolidated Fund Bill debate, of the ecological consequences of a military option? The pumping of oil into the Gulf was predicted as it was predictable. Is this not a case of sheer ministerial incompetence? Why are the 70 tonnes of equipment not there already? These Ministers are not competent to run a war.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will realise that there have been many warnings of many environmental threats as a result of what Saddam Husein can do. The issue is coping with them as effectively as necessary and we are taking those steps. The countries whose coasts are most affected are those who, outside the war zone, are bound to take the lead in such a circumstance. That process is now under way.

Mr. Dalyell: The Government were told, told, told.

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman understands the full implications of this matter, he will know that this House has clearly expressed its determination to resist Saddam Husein in his illegal occupation of Kuwait. There were bound to be risks associated with that process. Not to have confronted Saddam Hussein would have led to larger and more damaging risks in future.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I wonder whether the Secretary of State remembers that, last May, 1,100 tonnes of oil were spilt into the English Channel as a result of the holing of the Rose Bay outside Brixham in south Devon and that it took six Dakotas spraying for four or five days on top of that oil slick, a number of ships with vacuum cleaning equipment to filter the oil through the ships and clean it, as well as thousands of volunteers to clean up the coast, to deal with the problem. Was anything learnt from that experience? I wonder whether it has been estimated how many Dakotas and such ships, as well as volunteers, would be needed to clean up the slick in the Persian Gulf?

Mr. Heseltine: There is one vital point about which my hon. Friend will want to think: the slick is in a war zone. The House will doubly regret the fact that, yesterday, when allied aircraft inspected the slick, they were fired

upon by Iraqi ground forces. I am afraid that it is a question not of considering what use we can make of Dakotas or volunteers, but of how we deal with the slick once it moves from the military war zone into an area where civilian forces can be deployed.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Will the Secretary of State accept that we are all concerned about the environment, and that we are not prepared to take any lectures from Conservative Members about that?

Will he confirm that, however disastrous the environmental effects of the oil spillage, they are not as disastrous as the effects of bombing innocent civilians in Iraq? Is he also concerned about the effects on the environment of bombing chemical and nuclear factories in Iraq? Given Saddam Hussein's threat to bomb the deep wells in Kuwait, what steps has the right hon. Gentleman taken to prevent that disaster?

Mr. Heseltine: The most effective answer is to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, and that is precisely what we are doing. The hon. Gentleman must bear carefully in mind the fact that those chemical factories, which are the source of such anxiety, have already been used by Saddam Hussein in attacks on his own people. The risks exist, and that is one reason why we must take his threats so seriously. There is no escape from the implications of that, as the House, by overwhelming majority, has recognised.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Following this appalling and uncivilised act, my right hon. Friend will be aware that many individuals and organisations throughout the country have volunteered support and help. What response can my right hon. Friend give those people?

Mr. Heseltine: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that matter. We have been very impressed with the number of people from environmental movements, and other citizens, who have offered help. We would have expected no less in the circumstances. We have asked the Nature Conservancy Council to co-ordinate the applications that we have received to see what capabilities lie behind them, so that, when it is considered safe and appropriate for such facilities to be drawn upon, we shall be in a position to offer them to the Gulf states.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has not this act of undoubted environmental terrorism, together with all the other crimes committed by those who run the regime in Iraq, shown that, once again, we can expect nothing better? What has occurred has not weakened, but strengthened, the resolve of the British people that this war must be seen through to the end until the Security Council resolutions have been duly implemented and Kuwait is free of enemy occupation.

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the hon. Gentleman speaks for the whole House; I wish only that it was not apparent that some of his hon. Friends have different views. The fact is that Saddam Hussein has used chemical weapons against his own people, he has attacked innocent Israeli citizens to try to widen the war, and he has unleashed an environmental disaster on the Gulf. Anyone who now fails to understand the urgent need to remove the threat of that man by driving his forces from Kuwait simply does not understand the nature of the man himself.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): In the midst of this awful disaster, will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the exceptional skill of the American pilots who bombed and destroyed the manifolds at the pumping station yesterday?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that the whole House would welcome the opportunity to do precisely that. The environmental disaster already exists, but it could have been a great deal worse if we had not been able to stop the flow.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): In a radio interview this morning, the Secretary of State was asked for his response to Jordan's request for a ceasefire to clear up the oil. He said that Saddam Hussein, having been capable of letting loose the oil and destroying the environment, would of course do much worse if he had a nuclear capability. Because this disaster was predicted, I ask the Secretary of State to tell us what information he has about the environmental consequences of destroying Iraq's nuclear capability on the ground, and to tell us the environmental consequences of the use of any one of the 700 nuclear warheads on American ships in the Gulf.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Lady will want to bear in mind the consequences of Saddam Hussein having a fully developed nuclear capability, the dangers of which would greatly outstrip the much lower dangers that flow from the question that she asked. The fundamental question is: does the hon. Lady believe that we should give in to blackmail of any sort—nuclear, chemical or environmental? Once the dictators of this world get the impression that giving in is on offer, there will be no stopping the price that they seek to extract.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is an environmental crime unique in its enormity and that Opposition Members—fortunately, they are few—who do not join the whole House in condemning Saddam only encourage this evil man to continue his fight?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much hope that Saddam Hussein will draw no such conclusion, because my clear understanding is that the overwhelming majority of Opposition Members are as appalled as my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are by what has happened. We hear from a small and wholly unrepresentative minority among the Opposition.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): As a member of that unrepresentative minority, may I ask the Secretary of State to accept that I have been condemning Saddam Hussein for more than 10 years, and that I will continue to do so?

I condemn the environmental damage done to his own people through chemical weapons and the environmental damage to the whole Gulf through the oil spillage. The right hon. Gentleman has been telling the House that that environmental damage is an acceptable risk in the prosecution of this war, from the point of view of the Government—

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Of course it is.

Dr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman clearly endorses that viewpoint. How much more environmental damage does the Secretary of State regard as an acceptable risk?

[Dr. Thomas]

Finally, we welcome the moves through UNEP, and the OECD initiatives, but why should we have to wait for an act of war like this before such international co-operation takes place?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not regard the risks as in any sense acceptable, but they were not created by the allies. They exist because Saddam Hussein has built up a chemical and conventional capability on an horrendous scale and he is now building a nuclear capability on an even larger scale. The hon. Gentleman must face the logic of that. He either thinks it right that Saddam should do that and is prepared to live with it, or he joins those of us who believe that this man poses threats that are unacceptable and that the United Nations stand is therefore wholly right.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Is not the implication behind the remarks of those who are now falling over themselves to tell us that they told us so that we should have given in to Saddam Hussein's blackmail? Does not this brutal and vicious act, which will result in the suffering and deaths of hundreds of thousands of creatures in the Gulf, show what an evil man Saddam is? Will not the wildlife of the Gulf probably prove to be ultimately his most enduring and innocent victims?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much share my hon. Friend's anxieties and hope that his forebodings will not come to pass. That will depend on our being able to cope with the environmental risks expeditiously. I also agree with the first of my hon. Friend's observations. Once one has come to conclusions about the nature of the man, about his military capability and about how he is ruthlessly prepared to use it, one can take only one logical decision: it is the one that we have taken—to withstand this man's determination to occupy Kuwait.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): May I bring the Secretary of State back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said about warnings of this disaster? Does he recall the Secretary of State for Energy, a member of the War Cabinet, telling us on 4 January that

"suggestions of a global environmental disaster are entirely misplaced"?

That was the Government's response to those warnings. Now that there is an oil slick 20 times the size of that from the Exxon Valdez, what are the possibilities of Iraq re-starting the flow of oil despite the bombing; and will the Government now take seriously the warnings given by Saddam Hussein months ago that he would set fire to the Kuwaiti oilfields?

Mr. Heseltine: Of course, one was very aware of the warnings that came from many people. The only implication of accepting them was that one was prepared to be blackmailed by anyone who had the power to carry out such threats. That position is not one that we are prepared to tolerate. The hon. Gentleman referred to the observations made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy following the extreme forecasts from Jordan. My right hon. Friend was speaking about the firing of oil wells. I spent part of last Friday morning at the Hadley centre for climate prediction and research, when it was quite apparent that the advice of which my right hon. Friend spoke is supported by world-class expert opinion in this country.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many people in this country feel that a man who shows such contempt for human life, wildlife and the environment should himself become a target in the war, and ought to be removed—as that is the one way that we can protect lives, preserve the environment in the Gulf, and avoid any similar acts in future?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend, I know, expresses a view that is widely shared. However, the Government are committed to upholding United Nations resolutions, and the military judgments that flow from them must be accounted for by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs or Secretary of State for Defence. I am here to talk about the environmental issues that are the subject of my statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must protect the business that is before the House, but I will allow questions to continue for a further 10 minutes. Otherwise, I may have to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches in the subsequent debate. I ask hon. Members to ask brief questions on the statement only, and not on wider issues.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I, as a supporter of the implementation of the United Nations resolution that unfortunately but inevitably led to the war, put it to the Secretary of State that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a very valid point? In the light of his warnings, why did not the allied forces bomb the tank facilities on the seafront at Kuwait that feed the sea pipeline from which much of the oil has flowed? If that pipeline had been bombed several days ago, it would have prevented the environmental disaster that my hon. Friend predicted.

Mr. Heseltine: I am not sure whether the world would have understood if, by bombing such a pipeline, we ourselves had been responsible for the spillage that flowed into the Gulf as a result. Although the scale of the disaster would have been much lower, it would have put a totally different construction on our attitudes towards the preservation of the environment.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the simple message is that it does not pay to give in to blackmail of whatever type—and that we are here confronted with ecological blackmail? Can our armed forces assist in cleaning up that awful catastrophe?

Mr. Heseltine: At this moment, no British service men are involved in the environmental consequences or their abatement. It is a matter for the military commanders on the ground to decide whether or not it is appropriate for them to become involved.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State really telling the country that, despite everything that he learned during his time as Secretary of State for Defence and the vast experience that he gained during his time as a national service man, he was so naive that he did not imagine that such a catastrophe would occur? Does he now acknowledge that it is a consequence of war of the

type that, over the past four or five weeks, he and his colleagues firmly denied would arise? The Secretary of State talks about Saddam Hussein using chemical weapons on his own people, but has he conveniently forgotten that he was a member of the Cabinet that gave Saddam Hussein £1 billion after he had used chemical weapons against his own people?

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Ewing: The right hon. Gentleman makes certain accusations against my hon. Friends—but he should look home, to his own record.

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the hon. Member has completely misunderstood the British Government's approach towards Saddam Hussein's build-up of armaments. There are no grounds whatsoever for the allegations that he has made. If he asked me, "Were these risks and the warnings built into the risk of war?", the case is only answerable in the affirmative, but what conclusions does one draw from that? There is only one conclusion —that one cannot allow oneself to be subjected to nuclear, chemical or environmental blackmail.

As to how one copes with the individual warnings, given that there are a legion of them, it must be a matter for the individual countries concerned, or for the allies, to determine how best to deal with the situation. At the moment, there are no grounds for saying that we could have got equipment into the area faster than we are now doing. It is a war zone, and it is not possible to treat the oil slick in the way that we would have treated it in ordinary peacetime circumstances.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich (Mr. Thompson), is the Secretary of State aware that a number of small businesses in East Anglia may well have the technology to help clear up the consequences of this appalling act of eco-terrorism? Will he ensure that those small businesses are given every encouragement by his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon Friend will understand that we have widely publicised our response, and we have made it clear that we shall do all that we can to help the Gulf states in these circumstances. It would be appropriate for small businesses to show some of the enterprise for which they are characteristically admired, by coming forward with their own offers.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): This oil pollution is clearly an environmental outrage for which Saddam Hussein is primarily responsible, but, will the Secretary of State, who went to the War Cabinet meeting this morning, comment upon the article in *The Observer* yesterday by Julie Flint, which says:

"US bombers attacked two tankers at a Kuwaiti oil terminal on Tuesday."

Is that true, and can we have an assurance now that the allies will not bomb any more tankers?

Mr. Heseltine: I have told the House that the oil slick and the appalling problems that we now have to confront, flowed from the deliberate release of oil from five tankers. That is what the responsibility amounts to. I do not think that it is proper for me to give answers to what could easily turn out to be questions of military judgment in confused circumstances. If that has to be confronted, it will be accounted for.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesend): Are not oil tank farms of this sort fitted with fail-safe systems to stop such spillages; furthermore, are they not fitted with earthwork systems to contain any such spillages? If that is the case, is it not absolutely clear that this incident was deliberate, and was yet another example of the absolute inhumanity of that repulsive regime?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend comes to the heart of the matter. There is no doubt in our minds that this was a deliberate act, with appalling environmental consequences for the Gulf.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): At the meeting which the Secretary of State had this morning, did the team around the table discuss an Australian-manufactured chemical called Sokerol, which is marketed in Europe by a company in my constituency? The company made the Ministry of Defence an offer before the Gulf war started to make the chemical available because, unlike most chemicals, it is an oil-absorbent, which is non-toxic, non-carcinogenic and completely biodegradable. Was that discussed, given the fact that many warnings were issued about what might happen in the Gulf?

Mr. Heseltine: We did not discuss specifically any particular chemical at any meeting I have had today. We determined to draw together all the best information and all the offers that we had received, to evaluate them in so far as we have the capacity to do so, and then to inform the Gulf states of where we can help. I will ensure that the chemical to which the hon. Gentleman refers is put forward for special consideration to ensure that we have not overlooked anything.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): In the light of the despicable ecological devastation caused in the Gulf over the past few days, will my right hon. Friend accept that his comments earlier today about the possibility of a ceasefire to allow time for clearing up were particularly welcome? Will he now confirm, fairly and squarely, that a ceasefire would not save one bird, one fish or any lives, or ensure that the Gulf spillage could be cleared up? Quite simply, it would play into the hands of Saddam Hussein, and achieve nothing else.

Mr. Heseltine: I could not have put it more effectively. It seems clear to me that a man with Saddam Hussein's record, if given any respite, will claim credit for it; and the respite will do nothing to undermine his ability to start all over again the moment that hostilities begin.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): However the tragedy occurred, it amounts to a crime against the planet. It is worth reminding the Secretary of State and the House that, when the Opposition were telling the right hon. Gentleman what a maniac Saddam Hussein was, the British and American Governments were cuddling up in bed with the monster. That is what this is really all about.

Will the Secretary of State pledge that all the necessary resources will be made available to the volunteers from animal welfare groups who are prepared to go into the Gulf, even while it is a war zone, to try to rescue some of the animals that are now victims of the collective insanity of man?

Mr. Heseltine: When talking about crimes, the hon. Gentleman should concentrate more of his effort on talking about the criminal who perpetrated the crimes.

It would be entirely wrong for us to suggest to the military commanders the introduction of a civilian presence of the environmental nature suggested by the hon. Gentleman. This matter must be judged by the military commanders, in the light of the circumstances. The presence of such people would immediately mean that the military would have to look after them, protect them and spend a great deal of their time ensuring that there was no enhanced risk to them; that would not be justified in the circumstances.

Points of Order

4.16 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not extraordinary that the Secretary of State for Defence should have announced yesterday, on the radio, fundamental and important changes in the war aims of the British Government in the Gulf? He made it clear that, even if Iraq withdrew from Kuwait, allied forces would launch a ground and air attack on Iraq if it was perceived to maintain a military threat. That is clearly a major change in Britain's war aims; yet the House of Commons is being given no opportunity to question the Secretary of State—or, indeed, the Prime Minister—about such an important matter.

I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, to reconsider the application that I made to you earlier for an emergency debate on the war aims of the British Government in the Gulf, arising from the exchanges that have taken place today on a very narrow but nevertheless very important subject. I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to allow such a debate to take place, if the Government are not——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is plainly cheating. As the hon. Gentleman knows very well, I explained to him when he came to see me—as he has raised the matter, let me say that he did come to see me about it—why it would not be possible for me to do as he asked, as it would be an abuse of our procedures.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. About three months ago, I raised with you—you dealt with it sympathetically—the question of where the division lay between the responsibilities of the Department of the Environment and those of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in relation to international environmental matters.

Given that there will clearly be opportunities in the House for requests to question Ministers and to table questions, I wonder whether the Secretary of State for the Environment could consult his colleagues in the FCO and the Ministry of Defence. Perhaps a note could be issued explaining which Department should most appropriately deal with matters that fall within such a confused area of responsibility.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks will have been heard by the Secretary of State for the Environment, and by those on the Front Bench who are responsible for such matters.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

I will put the three motions together.

Ordered,

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. What could be more urgent and definite than the war aims in which we are now involved? If it is said—I understand that it is said—that confusion is being created, that is a judgment that may or may not be made; but if ever an application under Standing Order No. 20 should be——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is on this subject every day. It is a continuing matter. I have to take into account all relevant matters and decide whether something has happened that is so urgent that the business before the House should be disrupted for this day or for tomorrow. I have made that judgment.

Orders of the Day

Ports Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As an island nation, Britain has a particular interest in the welfare of its ports and harbours. Much of the economic activity of the nation depends on these ports being able to deal with the tremendous demands that are made upon them. Even though the Channel tunnel will become available during the next 10 years, 85 to 90 per cent. of our trade either into or out of the United Kingdom will still be dealt with by our ports and harbours. It is important, therefore, to ensure that our ports and harbours are able to adapt to the changing needs of our economy and to cope efficiently and competitively with the many problems and challenges that they will face.

Until recently, our ports and harbours were unable to do that. They had been subjected over the years to antiquated, old-fashioned and anomalous legislation that defined their status. Restrictive practices and other difficulties also limited their modes of operation. During the 1980s, therefore, an important Government objective was gradually to change all that so that ports and harbours could face the future with confidence and with a structure that had been adapted to meet the modern needs of the society in which we live.

In 1983 Parliament approved the privatisation of Associated British Ports. Despite Opposition predictions, that has been a great success. A thriving employee share ownership scheme operates in the ports that were privatised. A large majority of the employees, including the dockers, are shareholders in the companies for which they work. They have seen the benefits that privatisation has brought to those ports.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Where does the Clyde Port Authority Bill, which appears to be securely anchored in the other place, stand in relation to clause 1? Will the sponsors of that Bill be advised by Ministers and their officials to throw it on the scrap heap because of the provisions of clause 1?

Mr. Rifkind: No such advice will be given to the sponsors of that Bill or to the sponsors of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill which is going through this House. Those private Bills were sponsored by the port authorities in question. It is entirely for them to decide whether they wish either to continue with their Bills or to wait and then use the provisions of this Bill.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The Secretary of State referred to the success of the 1983 legislation. Will he define what success there has been in the Scottish ports? Throughout the 1970s, 75 per cent. of all goods that were manufactured in Scotland were exported through Scottish ports. However, those exports are down to 25 per cent. At Grangemouth in my constituency, the number of dock workers has declined dramatically. They are struggling to

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

find enough work to fill the day. Where is the success of the 1983 legislation to which the Secretary of State has just referred?

Mr. Rifkind: The combination of the 1983 legislation and the ending of the dock labour scheme gave a tremendous boost to the prospects of the port industry throughout the United Kingdom. The fact that the Forth and Clyde port authorities—the two largest in Scotland—are among those most anxious to be privatised shows the opportunities that they believe are available.

One of the major benefits of the privatisation of Associated British Ports is that, unlike its predecessor, it has been able to use and develop its land for non-port purposes and to diversify its activities where that made sense. The result is a spate of schemes for the regeneration of old docks for recreation, housing and other facilities, thereby benefiting not only the local community but the company. It is right that those benefits should be recognised.

Subsequent to that privatisation was the ending of the dock labour scheme. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) prophesied doom and disaster if that measure was taken forward. He said:

"We believe that the Bill will be damaging to the ports industry and will bring a return to casual working."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 105.]

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I am glad that the Secretary of State mentioned that, because most reports show that it has been happening. Fifty per cent. of labour is now working for casual rates in many ports, exactly as I predicted. The Secretary of State seems to be as badly informed as were previous Secretaries of State.

Mr. Rifkind: I was waiting for the hon. Gentleman to promise that the next Labour Government would reinstate the dock labour scheme, such have been its benefits to the national economy.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the main consequences of the change have been entirely beneficial. We have seen, for example, an end to overmanning. The 50 per cent. net reduction in the number of dock workers in ex-scheme ports shows the gross inefficiency of those ports under the previous arrangements. Productivity in some ports has increased by 50 to 100 per cent. since the ending of demarcation disputes and the introduction of new flexibility. There is now competition among ports, which provides a faster turnround, and lower rates and benefits the whole economy. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would particularly welcome the revival of trade in historic ports such as Hull, which has reopened its container terminal and will reopen the Alexandra dock subsequent to these reforms.

The trust ports, of which there are more than 100 in various parts of Great Britain, have a curious and anomalous status. Some hon. Members might find it useful if I say that trust ports are independent statutory bodies established under local legislation. They are not owned by anybody except the state, nor are they accountable to anybody. Their status is a strange limbo which makes them neither properly public nor properly private, answerable neither to the shareholders nor to the Government.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I am intrigued by the Secretary of State saying that trust status is anomalous. Why are the Government so keen to press our hospital service into trust status if it has such an anomalous legal position?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting comparison, but he should appreciate that trust status for a port is an anomaly that results from a historical accident; it is not intended to give greater control to those who operate the ports in order to ensure their proper operation.

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): My right hon. and learned Friend said that trust ports are answerable to no one, but does he accept that a number of them, notably the one in my constituency, Great Yarmouth, which has its origins way back in the 17th century, are very much answerable to someone—the community that they serve? Although I do not disagree with the general theme that my right hon. and learned Friend will expound, I want him to offer more praise to trust ports for their accountability to the communities that they serve.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no doubt that trust ports have done their best, within the constraints of the legislation and of the structures under which they are required to operate. I am not sure that I can agree with my hon. Friend that trusts are answerable to the local community. They are not elected by the local community or indeed, by anybody else. In some cases the Secretary of State for Transport appoints the chairman and all the board members; in others he appoints a minority of the members. In many cases, the appointments are entirely in the hands of others.

In no case of which I am aware is a trust board entirely answerable to the local community. Whether in the public sector or in the private sector, boards will, I hope, be sensitive to the interests of the local community. However, I do not think that that sensitivity can be described in the terms used by my hon. Friend a moment ago. Indeed, in the case of some appointments I am required to consult other parties. All this is laid down in the local legislation for each trust port. There are over 100 such ports and, although many of them are very small, they form a major component of the ports industry. They include many of the largest ports in the country—London, Medway, Forth, Dover and Tees and Hartlepool.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): My right hon. and learned Friend has described the anomalous nature of the trust ports. It would appear that in many cases they have not been fully answerable to the community, as they are supposed to be. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this is entirely applicable also to municipal ports such as Bristol, part of which I represent? Is not it regrettable that, for legal reasons—and for legal reasons only—municipal ports cannot be given the same benefits as trust ports are about to be given?

Mr. Rifkind: I accept that some municipal ports are in a situation similar to that of the ports covered by this Bill. However, as they can already achieve privatisation through harbour revision orders, legislation such as this is not necessary for their transfer to the private sector.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, where municipal ports exceed the turnover figures set out in the Bill, there is no provision for a Secretary of State to give directions?

Mr. Rifkind: That is certainly the case. Obviously municipal ports are controlled by the municipality, but there is an option for their transfer to the private sector. That is why it was not thought appropriate to deal with them in this Bill, which is concerned with all ports that have trust status.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Portsmouth is a municipal port. One difficulty is that local authorities do not have the money to develop ports as they should be developed if they are not to be sold. Brittany Ferries and others would like to invest millions in local authority ports, but they could not acquire shares unless there were some sort of half-and-half arrangement on the way to privatisation which would enable them to reap the benefits of private money doing precisely what municipal ports at present cannot do. In such cases there should be more flexibility.

Mr. Rifkind: I am sure that many local authorities will allow their ports to be transferred to the private sector, thereby securing many of the significant benefits that will be available to the trust ports. This would enable them fully to develop their potential and to respond to the commercial environment in which, as large businesses in their own right, they must operate. It would give them access to share capital as well as loan capital. It would make them more attractive, as partners, to companies that might wish to go forward in joint venture. It would enable them to stimulate the development of land surplus to their requirements which, under current legislation, they are sometimes unable to do. It would make it easier for them to diversify their activities, thereby ensuring their viability in years to come. It would make them more accountable.

I emphasise that at the present those ports are not accountable to anyone. If they were companies in the private sector, they would have to be conscious of the need for accountability. Finally, transfer to the private sector would introduce the prospect of substantial employee share ownership. That is not just a theoretical option; as we have seen in the case of Associated British Ports, it is one of the major benefits of the privatisation scheme.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the trust ports have access, under conditions, to grants for capital works through the Secretary of State for Scotland or through the appropriate English Minister? The Bill seems to be silent on this point, but does not it follow logically that, if the trust ports become private companies, they will no longer have access to Government loans? What benefit is that to the ports?

Mr. Rifkind: That is a theoretical question. Apart from the Port of London authority—for which there is different provision in the Bill—there have been virtually no examples of grants or financial assistance from Government to any trust port in recent years. The hon. Gentleman should bear that in mind.

I am conscious of the fact that one of the main criticisms from certain quarters relates not to the Bill as a whole but to that part of the Bill which permits the Secretary of State in certain circumstances to require a trust port to bring forward a privatisation scheme, and I shall address my remarks to that.

I emphasise that previous privatisations, almost without exception, have not been enabling measures but have been compulsory measures. The Government and Parliament have said that such and such an industry will be privatised in a particular way and privatisation has not been expressly subject to the consent of an individual company or industry. The Bill is an exception, in that it is primarily an enabling measure. It does not say that all the trust ports will be privatised, as happened in previous privatisation measures. The Bill already recognises that many different circumstances affect individual ports and therefore that it would not be appropriate or wise to have a single policy which automatically and without further consideration applied to all the ports in Great Britain.

I do not dismiss out of hand the concern that has been expressed in certain quarters, nor do I say that it is unreasonable, unjustified or unnecessary. The Government have recognised that concern in their response and in drafting the Bill. The Bill enables the trust ports to come forward with proposals for privatisation.

In our view, and we hope in Parliament's view, it will be considered in the public interest that the trust ports, especially the larger ones, will enter the private sector and thereby be able to benefit fully from the opportunities that that will provide.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for spending some time on this issue. As I understand it, clause 9 enables the Secretary of State, after an initial period of two years, to give a direction requiring the authority to bring forward a scheme for the purposes of a transfer. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain that clause?

Mr. Rifkind: I am drawing attention to that point. Generally speaking, and unlike previous privatisation Bills, the Bill is an enabling measure. A fallback power enables the Secretary of State to require a particular trust port to be privatised, but even that power is not unqualified—it is hedged around with all sorts of requirements and preconditions. First, the use of that power cannot be contemplated until two years after the passage of the legislation. Secondly, it can be contemplated only in respect of those trust ports with a turnover of more than £5 million a year. That figure will not be unchanging, but will be indexed to ensure that the real purpose behind that restriction continues for a number of years.

These conditions mean that, although there are about 100 ports round our coastline, only 14 will be subject to even the possibility of being required to be privatised against their wishes. The vast majority of ports do not see that as a potential risk because of their small turnover.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my right hon. and learned Friend publish the list of 14 ports? He may already have done so by way of written answer, but I should be grateful for that information.

Let me ask a question about fishing ports? How will the level of turnover—the £5 million requirement—be assessed? I take it that the £5 million relates to the turnover of the port trust itself rather than to total fish sales, which might come under the umbrella of the harbour commissioners. Am I right in thinking that the £5 million

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relates to the revenue that the trust receives from the sales rather than to the sales themselves? In respect of fishing ports, that is most important.

Mr. Rifkind: I confirm that the £5 million refers to the turnover of the trust port itself.

My hon. Friend asked which trust ports will be affected by the potential power of compulsory privatisation. They are the ports with the largest turnover—London, Dover, Tees and Hartlepool, Medway, Forth, Tyne, Ipswich, Clyde, Harwich, Aberdeen, Milford Haven, Poole, Lerwick and Blyth. Those are the only ports affected at present, although turnover will be subject to indexation, and other ports may come into the category if their turnover increases in years to come.

Mr. John Ward (Poole): My right hon. and learned Friend has been so generous in giving way that I, too, am tempted to intervene. He will be aware that the Poole harbour commissioners control an area of about 10,000 acres. We are anxious that, under any new legislation, the present environmental standards and regulations protecting the area against exploitation—at present, the whole harbour is designated a site of special scientific interest —should apply. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that that will be so whatever he may recommend by way of privatisation for all or part of the harbour?

Mr. Rifkind: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in Poole harbour and its future. I can give him the assurance that he seeks. Any requirements in respect of conservancy matters and environmental issues that affect the existing trust ports will equally affect any successor private sector port. The ports will be subject to exactly the same legislation and will have exactly the same obligations. Moreover, we have the precedent of Associated British Ports, whose conversion from public sector to private sector status has led to no diminutions either in obligations or in standards of behaviour on environmental protection.

I was explaining to the House the preconditions for compulsory privatisation: two years must have elapsed and the port must have a turnover of at least £5 million. There is an additional factor. If, after the two years, the Secretary of State for Transport wishes to require a port to bring forward a privatisation scheme, that scheme will be subject to consultation with the port authority and with other interested parties. My successor or I would wish to listen carefully to any considerations that might be put before us, and to arguments as to why privatisation might be inappropriate given local circumstances. Therefore, it would not automatically follow that other ports falling within the category would be privatised. That would depend on the response of the port and of other local interests.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Let me raise two points from the opposite direction. First, can my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that, in Committee, he will consider reducing the £5 million cut-off to £1 million, thus bringing in a further eight ports? Will he also consider reducing the two-year period to one year, as that seems much more realistic?

Secondly, Belfast is one of the largest trust ports in the United Kingdom, with a turnover of £10 million. Once again, Northern Ireland has been excluded from important legislation and an important trust port has been missed out. Even if it means introducing a separate Bill, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider the possibility of giving Belfast the same opportunities as the trust ports included in the Bill?

Mr. Rifkind: On the latter point, I would want to take into account the views of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. On the first point, we shall naturally listen with great interest to the arguments made in Committee and we shall consider amendments, including amendments tabled by my hon. Friend in an attempt to make the opportunities even more widely available, which is clearly what he wishes.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Secretary of State say more about the criteria for invoking the compulsory privatisation clause? As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know, the matter has been discussed widely over a considerable period. What would the right hon. and learned Gentleman say to the majority of the commissioners of the port of Aberdeen who were appointed by him in his previous incarnation as Secretary of State for Scotland, who represent commercial and industrial interests in the city of Aberdeen and who have solemnly declared that they are opposed to privatisation because they see no need for it? Why does the Secretary of State want to go against his own business friends?

Mr. Rifkind: No decision about Aberdeen could be taken until at least two years after the enactment of the Bill. We would then wish to consider the circumstances at the time and to hear not only the port authority's conclusion but the reasons for it. We should want to consider whether they were valid reasons that needed to be taken into account or whether they reflected a misunderstanding of the likely implications of privatisation. It is premature for the hon. Gentleman to assume that Aberdeen will be a candidate for compulsory privatisation and to expect to know what the relevant consideration may be at some time in the future.

Let me deal with the proposals concerning the Port of London authority.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who was Secretary of State for Scotland in his previous incarnation, is well aware that Lerwick harbour trust had succeeded both in diversifying its port business and in developing its surplus land. Clearly, such achievements are possible under the auspices of the trust port as presently constituted. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the Government would not stand in the way of trust ports seeking to increase their powers and to develop in that way merely because they had not opted for privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that one of the problems that the trust ports face is the great difficulty involved in extending their powers. They are constituted under trusts which lay down their powers and responsibilities. A number of ports have been prohibited or inhibited from developing what would otherwise be the normal commercial activities of a company seeking to make the best use of the assets available to it in respect of surplus land. For Lerwick and for other ports, the

privatisation option provides the most attractive way of releasing opportunities and does not entail any dangers of that kind.

The Bill deals with the Port of London authority separately and in a manner different from the other trust ports. The Bill provides for the privatisation of a trust port in its entirety, except in the case of the PLA. The PLA is empowered under the Bill to sell off its commercial docks at Tilbury, but it will retain its conservancy and other statutory functions as regards the River Thames as a whole.

In concluding that this is the right course to take for the PLA, we have had in mind three factors peculiar to London. The first is the sheer size of the area for which the present PLA is responsible: 150 km of river from Teddington lock to well seaward of the Medway estuary and Clacton-on-Sea. The second is the very wide range of regulatory functions that the PLA undertakes compared with other port authorities, including in particular the regulation of public passenger traffic on the Thames. The third is the place and role of the river in the capital city —for example, in its use for state occasions and by royalty.

I know that the PLA welcomes the proposals. The House will wish to know that the proceeds from the sale of Tilbury will go towards repaying to the Government the PLA's outstanding debt and repayable grant.

The Bill also includes provisions about navigational aids in harbour authorities' areas. These will correct an anomaly whereby some harbour authorities are financially responsible for all navigational aids in their areas and others are not. Where the harbour authorities are not responsible for those aids, the general lighthouse authorities—Trinity House in England and Wales, the Northern Lighthouse Board in Scotland and the Commissioners of Irish Lights in Northern Ireland—are. The Bill makes it possible for those responsibilities to be transferred from the general lighthouse authorities to the local ports.

Let me outline the specific provisions of the Bill. Part I deals with the privatisation of trust ports in general. Clause 1 defines a trust port by excluding other categories of harbour authority. It also excludes the Port of London authority from the provisions of part I. It empowers trust ports to set up a successor company to which the property, rights, liabilities and functions of the trust port may be transferred.

Clause 2 provides for the property, rights, liabilities and functions of the trust port to be transferred to the successor company on the coming into force of a transfer scheme to be made under this part of the Bill. Part I of schedule 1 contains supplementary provisions which relate to all transfers under this clause.

Clauses 3 and 4 oblige a successor company, once the trust port's undertaking has been transferred to it, to issue securities of the company to the trust port as and when the trust port directs it to do so. The trust port is obliged to dispose of the whole of its holdings in the successor company at the time and on the terms that it thinks fit.

Clause 5 lays down that a trust port may not exercise any of its powers under clause 3 or clause 4 without the consent of the appropriate Minister. The clause also empowers the Minister to give the trust port authority directions about the exercise of those powers. In most cases in this context, the appropriate Minister will be the Secretary of State for Transport. But for fishery harbours in England he will be the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and for similar harbours in Scotland and Wales, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, respectively.

Clause 5 enables Ministers to approve the price at which a port is sold and also to whom it is sold. The Government will therefore be able to ensure that a fair price is paid for each port and that will be a main consideration of Government in considering ports' proposals for sales. In the Government's view, competitive bidding will be the best means of ensuring that a fair price is paid for each port. However, we also recognise the aspirations of many in the trust ports to carry out management and employee buy-outs. Such buy-outs give the work force the opportunity of participating directly in the benefits of privatisation and of acquiring a stake in their own business. We wish to encourage such management and employee buy-outs and are considering how to give effect to some degree of preference for them. Clause 6 contains supplementary provisions to the preceding clauses.

Clause 7 provides for the Minister to dissolve the authority once its functions have been discharged. Any remaining property, rights and liabilities of the trust port authority will then be transferred to the successor company. Those will include the proceeds of the sale of securities in the company, after payment of the Government levy and capital gains tax.

Clause 8 lays down the procedure to be followed by trust ports in making schemes for the transfer of their undertakings to successor companies. The trust port will need to submit a scheme to the Minister. The trust port will be required to advertise the fact that a scheme has been made and to notify its employees and those persons who have a locus in the appointment of members of the trust port authority; and it will be required to make copies of a scheme available for inspection. Representations regarding the scheme may then be made to the Minister within a period of 42 days from the date of advertisement. The Minister then considers whether to confirm the scheme, with or without modifications, and such confirmation will be given by means of an order.

Clause 9 gives the Secretary of State the reserve power to direct a trust port to make a transfer scheme. I have already said why that is a flexible proposal which takes into account the particular concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members and also by ports.

Clause 10 sets out the annual turnover requirement to which I have already referred. Clause 11 empowers the Secretary of State to make a transfer scheme of his own where he considers that a scheme which a port authority has been directed to make is unsatisfactory.

Clause 12 provides for a 50 per cent. levy to be charged on the proceeds of sale of the trust port's successor company. Hon. Members who followed the progress last year of the two private Bills promoted by the Clyde and the Tees and Hartlepool port authorities will be familiar with the concept and with the case for it. A similar 50 per cent. levy is chargeable on disposals under those two private Bills through the provisions in sections 115 to 120 of the Finance Act 1990. The trust ports have no legal owner except the state.

In the absence of a levy, therefore, the purchaser of the port would receive back the entire proceeds of the sale along with the port itself. It would be difficult, to put it mildly, to justify a windfall gain of such a scale going to the

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buyer, especially as we should aim for a level playing field between newly privatised trust ports and ports already in the private sector.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I wholly support what my right hon. and learned Friend is trying to achieve, but as a supporter of the abolition of the dock labour scheme, I see what he is doing as a further logical step to free our ports. Will he give us an indication of how he will give the remaining 95 trust ports the opportunity to become privatised which I believe is the appropriate place for those ports in the marketplace?

Mr. Rifkind: Every one of those ports will have the opportunity to be privatised under the provisions in the Bill. The only distinction between those ports and the larger ones is that the Secretary of State could not compel them to bring forward privatisation schemes unless they had a turnover of more than £5 million a year. However, all the ports that so wish may come forward for privatisation under the Bill, and we should be happy to encourage them to do that.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Will my right hon. and learned Friend clarify the tax and levy position? From what he has described, it seems that there will first be a 50 per cent. levy and then a capital gains tax assessment on the proceeds remaining. The balance of that money will go back to the authority and will ultimately be passed back to the purchaser. Is there not a more simple way of netting all that so the original bid can reflect the real sums involved instead of there being a complex scheme which leaves a certain amount for the Government, in the knowledge that the rest will return at the end of the day to the people making the bid?

Mr. Rifkind: I should be happy to hear any suggestions from my hon. Friend for an even simpler way of dealing with these inevitably complex matters. It is important that there be a clear distinction between the levy and capital gains tax. They are based on different concepts and they are obligations for different reasons. I am not sure that there is a simpler way, but if my hon. Friend has any proposals, we should be very happy to consider them sympathetically.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for explaining why in clauses 12 and 15 we are talking about a 50 per cent. levy. On 15 March 1990 the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport said, in relation to the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, that the reason for taking 50 per cent. was that

"there is a general rule that, when assets acquired or approved by a non-Exchequer Body with the aid of Government grants are disposed of, an appropriate proportion of the proceeds should go to the Exchequer."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 749.]

In the case of Tees and Hartlepool, the reason was that grants had been given 20 years ago. The Secretary of State referred to a level playing field, but he is now changing the goal posts.

Mr. Rifkind: The fact that grants have been paid is an important factor. However, even if no grants had been paid, it would be wrong for the entire value of the ports to revert to the purchaser who might have had no previous involvement in those ports.

When reflecting the public interest, the Government should be able at least to participate in the benefits that flow from the privatisation of those ports, and the proposal meets that public interest requirement in a fair and acceptable way. The only example where that was not the case was the privatisation of the Trustee Savings bank. That was unique in that it reflected the many millions of people who already had a direct interest in the TSB through their savings. That was a unique form of privatisation. In every other case it has been right and proper for the public, through the Government, to expect a share of the proceeds from the privatisation.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): While we are considering Tees and Hartlepool, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the additional levy referred to in clause 16 is not part and parcel of the Tees and Hartlepool privatisation and therefore would not be introduced retrospectively for land sales by the Tees and Hartlepool authority which at the moment are excluded?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is referring not to the 50 per cent. levy but to the possibility of a clawback on the disposal of any surplus land. Such a proposal is not contained in the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill which my hon. Friend is helping to guide through the House at the moment.

In the past, the taxpayer has contributed to the development of at least some of the trust ports, although on a relatively modest scale. We consider that it would be right to leave part of the proceeds of sale with the buyer as an additional incentive for privatisation, and we believe that a 50 per cent. levy establishes a fair balance between the interests of the taxpayer and those of the new owners of the port.

Mr. Holt: May I press my right hon. and learned Friend for an answer? I appreciate that he has recognised that I am piloting a private Bill through the House, but he did not answer my question. Quite simply, it was whether the Government have any intention at this very late stage, bearing in mind that the Tees and Harlepool Port Authority Bill will receive a Second Reading in the House of Lords tomorrow, to insert a clause into the Tees and Hartlepool Bill similar to that which my right hon. and learned Friend is introducing into this Bill for all other trust ports?

Mr. Rifkind: We have no intention of making any changes to the Bill that my hon. Friend is bringing forward in connection with those matters. Obviously, as this Bill goes through the House, we shall have to see whether improvements or changes are required, but we have no intention at the moment of making the changes to which my hon. Friend referred.

I draw hon. Members' attention to one difference between the levy provisions in this Bill and those in the Finance Act. Under the Finance Act, the levy is chargeable either on the proceeds of sale or on the market value of the port, whichever is the greater. Under this Bill, the levy will be charged only on the proceeds of sale. That is because, under this Bill, the Government will be able to ensure that the port is sold for a fair price and there is therefore no need for the market price provision. That change will add greater certainty to the sum on which levy and capital gains tax will be chargeable, since it will be on the proceeds that capital gains tax also will be chargeable.

Clause 13 sets out the arrangements for the payment of the levy. Clause 14 sets out the arrangements for the provision of the information which the Secretary of State will need for the purposes of the levy. Clause 15 provides that the levy paid will be allowable as a deduction against capital gains tax liability, and makes other supplementary provision relating to the levy.

Clause 16 provides for the Secretary of State to make an order for a levy of 50 per cent. on any gains from the disposal of land by the successor company within 10 years of the transfer of property to the successor company. The details of the clawback provision to be made under this order, and on precisely what types of transaction it will bite, are still being considered. That clawback provision will be a further element in establishing a proper balance between the interests of the taxpayer and those of the new owners of the privatised ports. It will be some discouragement to anyone who might intend to purchase a port merely for purposes of land speculation.

Clause 17 is supplementary.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Apart from the point mentioned by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), how close is part I to the Tees and Hartlepool Bill and the Clyde Bill? The Secretary of State said that there were similarities. Certainly, in connection with the successor company and the 50 per cent. clause, there is much overlap. The Tees and Hartlepool Bill and the Clyde Bill were encouraged and assisted by the Department of Transport. It seems rather strange that the Bill is making progress in the House of Lords when this umbrella provision could apply to Tees and Hartlepool and Clyde.

Mr. Rifkind: Obviously, this Bill is to ensure that we do not need a private Bill every time one of the 100 ports in the United Kingdom may wish to bring forward privatisation measures.

Mr. Barnes: What is the difference?

Mr. Rifkind: There are two differences between this Bill and the provisions of the private Bills. One is the absence of clawback provisions in the private Bills, and the second is that the 50 per cent. levy in the private Bill falls on either the price received or the market value, whichever is higher. I have been explaining that, in the case of this Bill, the levy falls on the proceeds. We do not need to have the market value consideration, because it is an open competitive process.

Part II is concerned with the sale by the Port of London authority of the port of Tilbury. Clause 18 empowers the PLA to establish a company to take over the Tilbury undertaking. Clause 19 provides for the PLA to submit to the Secretary of State a scheme for the transfer of the Tilbury undertaking to that company. The Secretary of State's confirmation of such a scheme, with or without modifications, will be given by means of an order made by the Secretary of State. The statutory functions of the authority, to the extent that they relate to the undertaking to be transferred to the new company, will be transferred with it, subject to any exceptions made in the scheme.

Clause 20 is supplementary to the provisions in clause 19. Some of the property to be transferred to the Tilbury company would have required a works licence had it been owned by anyone other than the Port of London authority. Under clause 21, such licences will be deemed to have been granted to the Tilbury company on the date on which the transfer of property takes effect.

Clause 22 empowers the authority to dispose of the securities of the Tilbury company, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, who will be empowered to give the PLA directions concerning the disposal. Clause 23 enables the Secretary of State to direct the authority to form a company and to submit a transfer scheme for the Tilbury undertaking. That power will be available to the Secretary of State two years after enactment of this Bill.

Part III contains the provisions about navigational aids in harbour authorities' areas to which I referred earlier, together with certain supplementary provisions. Clause 25 confirms that harbour authorities have power to mark and to light their harbours and that they are to be regarded as local lighthouse authorities. The clause prevents the general lighthouse authorities from installing lighthouses, buoys or beacons in the area of a harbour authority unless they are aids to general navigation. Clauses 26, 27 and 28 cover similar detailed matters.

Clause 29 makes provision about the tax treatment of companies formed under parts I and II and of shares and debentures issued by them. Clause 30 makes provision for certain exemptions from stamp duty. Clauses 31 to 36 make various supplementary provisions, including the extent to which the Bill will apply to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will my right hon. and learned Friend undertake to bring the merits of the Bill to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? I am concerned that, with some exceptions, the Bill does not apply to Northern Ireland. There are important ports in Larne, Warrenpoint and Londonderry, but I am particularly concerned about Belfast.

When I was responsible for industry in Northern Ireland, the firms of Short Brothers and Harland and Wolff were privatised, and the Belfast harbour board is a substantial landowner, with Harland and Wolff and Shorts as its tenant. We have an anomalous situation in which a trust is the landlord of a privatised company. In that case in particular, it is most important that Belfast should be enabled to take advantage of the privatisation that is indicated in the Bill.

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening because he enables me to give an answer that will please him and many of my hon. Friends. Although the provisions of the Bill do not apply to Northern Ireland with regard to these matters because they are reserved for the Northern Ireland Office under its own system, it is my right hon. Friend's intention to introduce similar measures for the benefit of Northern Irish ports. Clause 35(3) of this Bill will enable it to apply the levy provisions in respect of any similar measures introduced in Northern Ireland in a similar way. Ports in Northern Ireland will be able to have similar facilities available to them, as my hon. Friend hopes.

The measure should be seen as a further stage in the modernisation of the ports of the United Kingdom. The reforms that were introduced in the 1980s, in particular the privatisation of Associated British Ports and the ending of the dock labour scheme, made an enormous difference to the ability of our docks to cope effectively and impressively with the needs of the late 20th century. It is important that

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the trust ports should also have those opportunities. The provisions in the Bill will not only ensure the public interest but ensure that ports throughout Britain will be able to respond in a way that will meet their aspirations, which will benefit not only the companies but, equally important, all who work for them.

5.7 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Secretary of State's speech contained much rhetoric but not many facts. I appreciate that a new Secretary of State for Transport is not always able to ascertain the full facts of what has occurred and must therefore rely on the advice of his Department. That may be dangerous in this case, so I shall point out some of the relevant facts of the matter.

There are always grounds for change in the ports industry; the argument is about the nature of that change and the purpose of it. My maiden speech was about the port of Hull and the shipping and maritime industry, which hon. Members know to be my background. I have heard debates on the docks industry for more than 20 years, and I have seen how the Government's policy has developed.

The Secretary of State was correct to point out that all the other measures that have come before the House, including the dock labour scheme and the privatisations, are part of the Government's strategy. It is a ports policy —the Government have not stood on the side. They clearly have a strategy and have seen a need to privatise the port industry, to deregulate it, to break up trade union organisations, to deny workers' rights, and then to proceed to sell off for development the land assets of many ports. The Bill represents the conclusion of that policy.

The Secretary of State has rightly put the Bill into a proper political context. There are provisions on the navigation lights system, which, as anyone who knows anything about the industry is aware, has been a vexed matter for an awfully long time. It is not properly organised. Historically, it has been organised badly. Those provisions will not find much opposition among Labour Members. We think that they will probably represent a better way of dealing with the problem.

It could be argued—indeed, Lord Rochdale said this in his investigation into the ports industry—that the trust ports have certain difficulties. But Lord Rochdale did not conclude that they should be privatised. He said that certain laws could be changed, such as the rule on the ports' borrowing requirements, and that the structure of the companies could be changed. He said that that could be done by order. He did not say that it would necessarily need one big Bill. However, I concede that, if the Government want to make a general principle applicable to all trust ports, it is better to do so in one piece of legislation, rather than by presenting separate Bills to the House.

When the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Clyde Port Authority Bill were before the House, the Minister said that the Government sought to deal with the matter through public legislation, rather than private Bills. That makes good sense. It is a good argument.

What is the Government's clear intention in the Bill? Is it simply to create a better and more efficient ports industry, as the Secretary of State claimed at a conference last week? In his introductory remarks, the Secretary of State was asked why, if it was a historical accident that trust ports were set up, the same principle had been applied to hospitals and port authorities. He did not answer the point clearly. It is the same principle. The new bodies will be appointed by the Secretary of State. They will not be accountable, yet he is breaking up the existing bodies because he feels that they are not accountable.

Trust ports did not arise by historical accident. There is one significant difference between what he proposes and what was originally intended when trust ports were set up. Trust ports were seen as a way of serving the community's needs. They were not intended to be used as profit-making centres. They were intended to meet the needs and service requirements of the whole community. They are non-profit-making organisations. The argument is about whether a non-profit-making port or a port that exists solely for profit is better for the community. At the heart of that argument is the desire for access to valuable land on which an awful lot of profit can be made. Indeed, it is possible to make a killing. In the Bill, the Government go out of their way to make sure that they will get a share of the booty when the ports are privatised.

Mr. Holt: All the trust ports have different historical backgrounds, so it is not possible for the Secretary of State, to state the history of trust ports from the Dispatch Box. The historical origin of my trust port of Tees and Hartlepool is that the Government of the day wanted somewhere to bunker their ships and needed to ensure that there was a navigational channel as far as Stockton, and that sailors were supplied with the goods and victuals required in the event of war. The hon. Gentleman makes a silly statement.

Mr. Prescott: If the hon. Gentleman believes that that is a contradiction of my view, he simply shows how ignorant he is of the purpose of the ports. He said that his port was set up as part of a public policy to meet a community's needs and to serve a national interest. The motive was not profit but the need to meet the nation's interest. Those who set up the bodies said that the ports should not exploit their position at the expense of others who wished to use the port. What the hon. Gentleman said fits in with the definition that I gave. Perhaps he will carefully examine his own port and determine why it was created. The Secretary of State made another point that I shall deal with in detail. It is a controversial matter. He quoted my speech of—I cannot remember the year.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): 1983.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman. It was my speech on the dock labour scheme. It could not have been 1983.

Mr. Rifkind: 1989.

Mr. Prescott: Yes—1989. I should have known not to rely on Whips, or at least Conservative Whips. That is not divorced from the matter with which I am dealing. In my speech in 1989, I said that the circumstances of workers would deteriorate if the Dock Work Bill was passed. The Bill was about workers' conditions. The workers' conditions have deteriorated. Casualisation has taken place in the industry, as people predicted. I know of 25 ports where casualisation has occurred since the dock labour scheme was abolished. Several of them are in

Scotland, so I should have thought that the Secretary of State would know about them. They include Dundee, Greenock and Leith.

There was a switch from the registered dock labour scheme to casual labour, sometimes at the rate of £2·50 an hour. People are hired by the day or half day. I expressed the fear that that would happen. I also said that workers would not be represented by trade unions in negotiations. That has happened in most ports around the country. According to the law, apparently an employer can recognise a trade union but he is not required to negotiate with it. That is what Associated British Ports has done throughout the industry.

There are many examples of where conditions have deteriorated. Under the dock labour scheme, training and health and medical facilities were provided. Such facilities are no longer provided in many ports. I said at the time that that would be one of the consequences of repealing the dock labour scheme. I was correct. The Secretary of State claims that what has happened contradicts what I predicted. He is wrong. If he tours the ports and asks questions, he will find that what I told him was correct.

I do not want to leave the Secretary of State with the impression that we do not concede the argument that some reform is needed. We conceded that the dock labour scheme needed some changes. As the Secretary of State must be aware, the Labour Government attempted to reform it. Two Labour Members abstained, and the reforms and the legislation fell.

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No. I want to put this on the record.

As Opposition spokesman on transport I was involved in discussions with Mr. Finney—one of the notorious people involved in the matter. He was then director general of the British Ports Federation and director of the National Association of Port Employers. I sought to tell him that there was room for negotiation and discussion. I suggested that we should put the deal on the table. I was prepared to talk to all parties. I understood that he was prepared to talk to the employers, but he said that no one would talk. I believe that they were prepared to talk.

I heard no more from Mr. Finney. Clearly, it was not necessary for him to communicate further because he was carefully planning to abolish the scheme. As he said in his document, he

"masterminded the highly successful campaign to end the Dock Labour Scheme, co-ordinating political activity"

for it. Yet he was telling me at the time that he did not intend to abolish the scheme. I shall come to Mr. Finney in a moment. He was one of the architects of the Government's abolition of the scheme. The Government are set to make an awful lot of money out of it, but I shall come to that point later.

I have not argued and the facts do not suggest that the Labour party does not concede the need for some change. In many of my speeches I have called for a ports policy. The Government do not believe in a ports policy. They do not believe in planning in the ports or any other industry. That is their position. Yet the inquiries conducted by Lord Devlin and Lord Rochdale concluded that it was necessary to have a consistent investment policy to meet the national interest, and that that required some planning framework, whether for investment or the development of ports.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No. I have no desire to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McLoughlin: Why not?

Mr. Prescott: He is such a small man. He will be out at the next election, so I do not want to waste any time.

I have always advocated some form of change in the ports, but the Bill must be seen against the background of the past 10 years of Government policy for the ports industry. The first approach was made by the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). When he became Secretary of State, he argued that there would be no interference with the ports. He said that he was not prepared to make any money available to the industry and did not intend to throw money at the problem. He said that there would be no public subsidy whatever. Then the Government began to dismantle the National Ports Council, which was set up by a Tory Government after the Rochdale committee report.

The Secretary of State began to notice the problem of increased capacity in the industry and of shipowners playing off port against port. There were many examples of that, but I do not have time to go into the details. The Government then proposed privatisation and to do away with public ownership, as they did with the British Transport Docks Board. It is now readily agreed that the Government sold it off for a song. If the Bill contains any evidence that the Government have learnt any lessons, it is the clause that allows them to obtain at least some value from the betterment of land whichwill take place at a later stage. That is one improvement. At least the taxpayers —the Government claim to act on behalf of the taxpayers —will now receive some of that value instead of losing hundreds of millions of pounds as they did in the price that was set for the British Transport Docks Board.

The Bill is concerned largely with the trust ports. I hear that there is no legal definition, although there is a qualification about that. No doubt we can discuss that in Committee. The problem is similar to the old one with the Trustee Savings banks. They are a special form of bank, as we said in our debate on their privatisation, just as trust ports are a special form of port. There are publicly owned ports, privately owned ports and trust ports. The argument is that they could be kept that way.

The argument that trust ports should be kept to meet community needs, rather than used for profits and their assets exploited to the advantage of those who own them, is legitimate and should be considered. The Government do not want to put the emphasis on service. They believe that the community's needs will be met through the pursuit of profit and competition. The case has not been proven, either through the privatisation of the bus service or some railway facilities, that competition, privatisation and the pursuit of profit meet social and community needs. That is at the heart of the difference between this side and the Government on these matters.

It has been useful to have a copy of what I thought was the Secretary of State's Second Reading speech at the Waterfront conference a week ago. He spelled out what he considered to be the Bill's aims. In his speech today he confirmed that the policy is to promote and develop the viability of competition in the industry. He feels that that is the best way forward. Therefore, the Bill is to remove the

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constraints on the trust port status. What are those constraints? I hear that these ports have difficulty raising money, and I read what Rochdale said about it.

I should like to have more evidence from the Secretary of State—this is probably best dealt with in Committee—about the kind of constraints that have prevented them from developing. Many have grown to become large ports and have been able to meet much of their investment requirements. Therefore, the Secretary of State must show us that they were effectively constrained. I am far from accepting that point. Nevertheless, we should perhaps deal with the constraint which Lord Rochdale depicted. It could be dealt with in different ways. Rochdale gave some examples, and the Minister acknowledged that there was an alternative path.

The Government's philosophy is to leave the way open to competition, price and the market system. Anyone who has read the Rochdale and Devlin reports will know their analysis that competition led to the ports competing so much on price that they did not invest. Port investment was run down to such an extent that Tory and Labour Governments had to pump millions of pounds into the docks industry to modernise it. That had nothing to do with labour conditions; it simply had to do with investment in the ports industry. That is admitted by all the reports that are there for everybody to see—reports which resulted from inquiries set up by Tory Governments.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Gentleman seems to be relying a great deal on the Rochdale and Devlin reports. Although his memory for dates is a bit wobbly today, can he remind us when those reports were published? I have forgotten, and I should like to see whether he is up to date with this industry.

Mr. Prescott: The Rochdale report came out in 1966. The inquiry was appointed by a Tory Government.

Mr. Janman: That was a quarter of a century ago.

Mr. Prescott: Well, at that time the argument was whether we could simply leave the matter for the market to decide, and Rochdale said no, it was against the national interest. So Tory and Labour Governments invested a lot of money in the industry. That is why the Secretary of State is claiming that he wants to take 100 per cent. from the PLP because a lot of money was given to the PLP. The debt runs to about £145 million. Nevertheless, the argument has been waived and the Government have moved from that position.

Mr. Ward: Wrong again—not the PLP, the PLA, the Port of London Authority.

Mr. Prescott: Great. The hon. Gentleman will for ever last on that seat.

The debt is a problem which the Secretary of State acknowledges. The very policy that the Secretary of State advocates will be based on the same philosophy that created such problems before.

The Secretary of State said today that if the ports were released, they could expand capacity. The problem in the British ports industry has always been excess capacity and how to deal with it. The problem has been how to deal with not having to reproduce the investments in the ports or, indeed, introduce expensive infrastructure into each of the ports. It is a real problem. In Europe there is no problem about planning the industry and making sure that only certain ports develop and fit in with regional and economic development. That is normal for Governments of the left and right in Europe. Over here, there is an ideological difference about whether there is a role for Government. Here, the Government's only role is to intervene and try to get the money. Our dispute with the Government is that their approach could lead us to the same problems to which that philosophy led us before.

I have given the example of the dock labour scheme. It was introduced to end casual labour. As soon as it was abolished and everything about maximising profit and cutting wages came in, we ended up with a casualised scheme.

The explosion in the industry came when everybody was forced down to poor working conditions. That is what led the Government to set up the Devlin commission. The Tories have always set up these commissions into what is going wrong, things have always gone wrong because of the private sector's handling of the situation, and the commission always come up with recommendations that the Government must intervene to put the industry on a proper footing.

Mr. Barry Field: Can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why dockers who were previously registered under the scheme, at Southampton now say that they do not wish to return to the scheme as they are better off working at Southampton in enhanced financial circumstances?

Mr. Prescott: The BTDB, which is now Associated British Ports, came to an agreement that there could be a labour co-operative in that area. The co-operative decided to provide the labour because the port authority decided to get out of doing that. That is another feature of the privatisation of ports which Rochdale pointed out. The port authorities did not do anything about hiring labour. It was all left to private companies, which led to many conflicts.

In Southampton, a co-operative deal was struck with the workers, who set up their own company. There is no consistency about that, of course. In Hull, the authority dismissed most of the workers from the scheme. Many of the workers got together and offered a co-operative arrangement, but the authority refused to reach agreement with them. The policy is not consistent, but I presume that that is why the workers in Southampton feel that they have got a better deal.

I am not against workers wanting control over their working conditions. It means that they work a scheme and try to deal with their labour conditions. The Bill supposedly suggests that the shares might go to workers in some sort of employee share ownership plan. That is a bit of icing on the cake. At the end of the day, the sale of the trust ports will be determined by the Secretary of State. He has already said that a fair price will be determined and that bidding will be competitive. That will create problems. The corporate structures, the corporate raiders, the big companies, will come in to buy the ports because they can see the land value involved. They will probably just want to take the assets and leave the rump or whatever is left of the port. Under the Secretary of State's formula, it will be possible to do that.

Anybody who has looked at management-worker buy-outs knows that the problem for them is that they cannot raise enough money to purchase the company. Many corporate raiders come along and offer much more than the value of the company because they see the advantage of that. That does not lead to worker co-operation and worker shareowning; it leads to big companies owning more of the ports and eliminating the competition.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Does my hon. Friend remember that, when we were involved in the privatisation of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, Mr. Hackney, who was the director of the port, said that, once it was privatised, he would buy other ports on the same coast?

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that that is so. Ports are bought mainly to ensure that they do not provide competition. Anyone who has looked at the evidence from the deregulation of aviation in America will see that a few big companies have taken over the small ones. Big companies dominate the industry. The Secretary of State might believe that it is against the national interest to have big corporations taking over more and more of these ports and perhaps we should hear his policy on that in Committee. Once one holds a view on that, it is a policy of national interest—a Government policy to have an idea of what sort of port industry is wanted.

The Bill is solely about selling to those who will pay most. That may well undermine the Government's alleged intention that a lot of ports providing competition is the best way forward. That kind of policy causes us concern. A lack of thinking about port policy dominates most of the Government's approach to the Bill.

The dock labour scheme has been mentioned a great deal, and I am sure that we will hear a great deal more about it. What makes me particularly annoyed about the Government's approach to the scheme is not that the Bill makes similar promises to what was promised on the Dock Work Act 1989. I am thankful for the paper produced for the Waterfront conference that points out that in one of the clauses the Government guarantee that trade unions will be recognised, that there will not be any unfair dismissals, that there will be the right to consultation and that the Bill is not anti-union. Frankly that is what was said about the dock regulation scheme. It did not mean a damn thing. The guarantee in the Bill will be no more protection for the workers in the industry than that given when the dock labour scheme was abolished. If the Government claim to be concerned about conditions in the industry they should address that problem.

There is a conspiracy against the port industry motivated by those who want to make an awful lot of money. The Waterfront conference, which was addressed by the Secretary of State, was set up by the Waterfront Partnership. It was organised by Nicholas Finney, Iain Dale and Peter Cropper. It is interesting to note that each of those men claims with pride to have been the architect of the "successful" campaign for the abolition of the dock labour scheme. One of them used to be director of the Conservative research department, and another worked as a researcher for Tory Members of Parliament. What we have is three Tories out to make a few bob from the industry.

At one time, Mr. Finney was the director general of the British Ports Federation. He acted in bad faith when he told me that he was prepared to talk about the renegotiation of the dock labour scheme when, at that time, he was actively involved with Ministers in its abolition. Two weeks before its abolition, the then Prime Minister made it clear that she had no intention of so acting, and its abolition appeared to be a surprise to her.

It is interesting to compare the then Prime Minister's statement with the evidence given by the Department of Transport to the Public Accounts Committee. The Department was asked why the assessment of the costs of the abolition were five times greater than the Department had estimated. The Department replied that it had had to hurry the thing through. I do not know why the Department gave that reason for having to pay so much. All three previous Secretaries of State attended lunches with representatives of the port industry and made it clear that they agreed to the abolition of the dock labour scheme within five years. That was said despite denials issued in the House.

We now know that there was close co-operation between the Department of Transport and the three gentlemen of Waterfront Partnership. They were involved in the abolition of the dock labour scheme, but they now appear to have become involved in the privatisation of the trust ports. Those three gentlemen are now about to set up a consultative organisation to tell people how best to deal with the trust ports. No doubt that will be a remunerative exercise and they will make a lot of money. I, as the Opposition spokesman, have sought the views of the PLA and the British Ports Federation, but I have received no response. Perhaps I should go to the Waterfront Partnership to discover the views of the owners in the industry.

Mr. Janman: The hon.Gentleman keeps on talking about making money and Mr. Finney. As a result of the abolition of the dock labour scheme, the only things that are making money are British ports and, therefore, British industry and our country. That has happened because the turnround time in the ports has been reduced by half. Tilbury in my constituency has had similiar success. The productivity of its container division has increased by 87 per cent. The ports are making money not only for themselves and their workers but for Great Britain plc.

Mr. Prescott: I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman is quite happy for people to be paid £2·50 an hour for eight hours on the docks. He would not work for that money, but such pay is one of the consequences of the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

In Hull, I spent a long time arguing with the BTDB. Stupid Treasury rules deployed by Labour and Tory Governments did not allow the ports to use their land as they wished. They were also subject to external financial limits that prevented them from borrowing to develop. Labour and Tory Governments made a mistake by listening to the damn Treasury civil servants and they did not have the intelligence to change the system. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) should understand that it is only because of subsequent changes that the ports are making money.

I have never argued that there is no room for change in the industry—in the past, I was involved in trying to reach new agreements on such changes. There were unacceptable

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practices in the industry. I made my dislike of those practices known when we discussed the dock labour regulation scheme. I did not like the fact that dockers' sons always got a job and with preferential treatment. I have always made my criticisms known.

One of the benefits of the document produced by the Waterfront Partnership was that it enabled me to read the paper produced by Mr. Prebble of the New Zealand Government. He is a Transport Minister and he came to see me to talk about problems associated with docks. When the New Zealand Government sought to deregulate the port industry they declared their intention for change and entered discussions on how best to achieve that. Despite the controversial nature of those changes, they were made with agreement.

It is also interesting to note that the New Zealand Government were able to bring about a 50 per cent. reduction in the dock labour force, but that it cost them just £20 million. When our Government made similar changes, it cost £135 million. The Public Accounts Committee, not surprisingly, has attacked the Government for being so stupid with taxpayers' money and throwing it at people.

The Government should have negotiations with the unions in the industry and others who are willing to talk, but they have got together with people who want to get to the cash. It is all about getting access to the land and the booty. The Bill has nothing to do with ports policy or fairness and justice in our industry. It is simply about how to rob trust ports of their money, land and associated assets.

The port employers may have got the Government to agree to the repeal of the port trusts, but now they are shocked that the Government want to take a share. I agree with the Secretary of State's suggestion that the Government should get some of the cash—I would prefer to suggest that it should be the community that gets the cash. There is no reason why the rewards from the sale of a particular port should not go to its local authority. That money does not necessarily have to go to the taxpayer; the local community has a right to some of the cash. I do not suggest that those local authorities should receive 50 per cent. of the cash—I should be happy to see them receive 100 per cent.

In the formula announced by the Secretary of State, the share received by the Government slides about from 50 up to 100 per cent.—that is what is worrying the employers. Those employers thought that they had done all the work and would get all the booty. They have done various deals, but the Government have now introduced a levy by which they will take 50 per cent. of the cash.

The Secretary of State has gone even further, however, by taking reservation powers. He does not want to be involved with the tiddlers; he wants to deal with those ports that have a turnover of £5 million. He is interested in the 12 biggest ports, which command 63 per cent. of the trade—that is where the money is. If those ports do not want to change willingly, the Secretary of State will impose those changes. Now we have a port policy.

The Government's policy is not directed towards achieving the best investment and standards in the country's interests; it is directed towards getting the booty and a share of the land. The Government are committed to that policy because the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has told us that he wants £5 billion a year from privatisations. That is Government financial policy up to 1994, and they have lined up all manner of public sector facilities to be sold off. The Bill has nothing to do with port policy. Yet again, Treasury policy is being imposed on the ports. That policy has done more damage to our ports, under Labour and Tory Governments, than anything else.

The Bill is an attempt to reach the £5 billion target. The Government talk about giving the workers shares, but what a load of nonsense. Workers and managements will be unable to bid against P and O and BTDB—they want to buy up the ports. They will succeed, and then they will cut out the competition. What will be Government policy then? Perhaps we shall find another Lord Rochdale in the 1990s who will tell us what to do with our port policy. That is the future offered by the Government.

I warn the Secretary of State—this will send shivers down his spine—that there will be a clawback. He reserves the right to do more, and says that it must be done in the first two years, which brings us within reach of the time of the next Labour Government. If I am appointed Secretary of State for Transport—who knows?—the right hon. and learned Gentleman will have left me great flexibility to deal with these ports. The Secretary of State will leave me tremendous powers to deal with all of them. I warn him that those powers will be used to go much further than he anticipates.

I have said nothing about harbours and navigation—we can discuss them in Committee. The same goes for the Port of London Authority, which is treated separately in the Bill. My experience of that authority shows that it is still savagely anti-union and that it has worsened conditions in the industry. That does not inspire confidence in an improvement in working relationships in the industry. The authority does not bother to communicate with Opposition Members or to tell us what it thinks about a Bill such as this.

There has to be an alternative. We shall scrutinise the Bill and what we inherit when we come to office. We believe that the Bill has nothing to do with port policy, and such a policy must be developed. Most European countries have one, after all. The policy must integrate our infrustructure: roads, railways and the gateways to the water must be linked with the rest of the country. The whole system must be co-ordinated; decent labour practices must be introduced; we must recognise the International Labour Organisation obligation that we are supposed to recognise, and the EC social charter.

We shall look into all those aspects when we come to power. All that the Bill does is allow the Government access to the wealth in the land involved. It will worsen the conditions of the workers. I have predicted that correctly before and I predict it again now. On all these grounds, Opposition Members will vote emphatically against the Second Reading.

5.41 pm

Mr. John Ward (Poole): Unlike the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), I remain confident that my right hon. and learned Friend will continue to issue regulations to the ports for some years to come.

I want to express the concern of my constituents about the possible effects of this Bill on the port of Poole. It is

perhaps inevitable that the Government should adopt a blanket approach to privatisation of the ports, but I hope to show that the ports covered by the Bill are not all the same, and to persuade the Minister that account should be taken of local variations and, above all, of the wishes of local people.

The port of Poole has been described as a textbook trust port. A port of some sort has been there since Roman times, and its fortunes have varied. Sometimes, as in the days of the great sailing ships, it has prospered due to the north American trade. At other times it has declined, as when deep-water ports such as Southampton were built to take the new steam ships.

In 1895, an Act of Parliament set up the Poole harbour commissioners to

"conserve, regulate and improve the Port and Harbour of Poole".

This they have done for nearly a century, and I pay tribute to the way in which they have balanced the needs of industry, leisure and fishing over the years.

The commissioners have followed a programme of modernisation and development, not always uncontroversially but always after consultation, and with a sensitivity which could act as a model for any such authority.

We now have a successful cross-channel-style port with regular scheduled freight and passenger roll-on roll-off ferry services to the Channel Islands and Cherbourg, as well as a conventional cargo operation which handles bulk cargoes and steel. But to many of us who live in Poole, that is only a relatively small part of the story.

The present harbour commissioners also protect the environment of the second largest natural harbour in the world. It covers some 10,000 acres and is a haven for many waders and wildfowl. The whole harbour is designated a site of special scientific interest. Brownsea island and a large area south of the harbour in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) are owned by the National Trust, and there is an on-going management plan agreed by the local authorities and other bodies concerned with the harbour.

Up to 10,000 small boats and windsurfers are estimated to use Poole harbour during the year, and it is the present harbour commissioners who agree the reasonable mooring rates with the various yachting organisations.

In and around Poole harbour, we have western Europe's largest onshore oilfield. The operator, BP, has spent a tremendous amount of time on scientific studies to establish how to carry out the development of Wytch Farm with the minimum of disruption to the environment.

The House will shortly be asked to consider a private Bill to establish an artificial island near Poole to recover oil from a large area, and the present harbour commissioners are accepting even now new responsibilities in conjunction with the local authorities to ensure that the oil operations are suitably supervised and controlled.

Poole harbour is also the base port for a thriving commercial fishing fleet, and it provides landing and marketing facilities for boats from the surrounding area. Currently, there are 138 registered vessels based at Poole, whose port benefits from its central position, coupled with good communications, particularly for the export of fish to the continent.

Besides the usual catches of fish, Poole is the base for a thriving and expanding shellfish industry, which is providing employment opportunities for younger fishermen. Poole harbour was recently designated as one of the nursery areas, for the important bass fisheries. New EEC legislation is due to come into force in 1993, and it will certainly have an effect on the local industry. Negotiations are currently in progress between the southern sea fisheries district and both the Poole harbour commissioners and Poole borough council to ensure that the right facilities are available.

Those involved are confident that, with the Poole harbour commissioners running the port, a satisfactory solution can be found, but they are concerned that a private company might well have a different outlook. Fishing is important to the local economy and provides employment for several hundred people, but the industry can operate effectively only with the full and active support of the port authority.

In this haven of peace and tranquility, we have now received our copy of the Government's Ports Bill. I must say right away that I agree with the principle of privatisation. Numerous examples show that industries which have been nationalised have prospered even beyond expectations when they have been privatised, and this has proved that the drain on taxpayers' money which some of these industries represented can be stopped.

My point about the Bill is that there are different types of port, and that we should not attempt to curb the individuality of those which are successful by applying a blanket policy of privatisation. Some ports are operated by local councils, using money provided by local community charge payers and taxpayers, and some of them are prime candidates for privatisation to avoid inefficiency and waste. Under such circumstances, privatisation must be attractive to the local population.

However, I have already explained that Poole is a trust port and, as such, is not a drain on the funds provided by community charge payers and taxpayers. It is self-supporting, and the present system run so successfully by the Poole harbour commissioners has proved how a method conceived by local people can evolve to safeguard the unique local environment. It is precisely the unique qualities of the port of Poole that I am trying to highlight.

As I have said, I am convinced that privatisation is the best way forward for some ports, but Poole already has a successful, thriving port without it being a burden on the local community.

By making full use of the income from those using the port, the Poole harbour commissioners have safeguarded the environmental attractions of the harbour, to such an extent that it is enjoyed to the full not only by the local population, but by the many hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to Poole each year.

Why, then, should we change the status quo? I have yet to be approached by anyone in Poole who wants our port to be privatised. Local people are happy with the way that things are, and are satisfied that their best interests are served by the harbour commissioners—most of whom are local men.

The obvious solution to the dilemma would be to remove the element of compulsion from the Bill. I raised the question of compulsion in connection with privatisation with my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State during Question Time on 26 November, and I remain convinced that privatisation should not be compulsory.

I fully understand and welcome the fact that, in introducing this Bill, the Government want to provide a quicker and simpler mechanism for the privatisation of

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ports, rather than applications being subject to the time-consuming and costly option of a private Bill. Some ports are already pursuing private Bills of their own, and I am glad that those who want to privatise their ports will be helped considerably by the Bill. However, I still fail to see the merit in compelling successful ports that have the overwhelming backing of local people to privatise their operation simply because that is what some other ports wish to do.

While the principle of privatisation is, quite rightly, one of the mainstays of this Government's policies, so too is the principle of freedom of choice—and I cannot see how that this latter principle applies to the Bill. Nevertheless, if it is felt that privatisation must take place, the Government should acknowledge that special conditions ought to apply to some ports.

A precedent for such a course of action has already been set by the way in which the Port of London authority is to be dealt with. The PLA is responsible for the whole of the river frontage, but the vast majority of that area is not a working port, so only Tilbury docks is to be privatised under the Bill. In Poole, the working docks comprise about 50 acres—only a tiny fraction of the total area of the harbour, which covers some 10,000 acres. That is much larger than the area that is to be left with the PLA in respect of London.

If privatisation must apply, I suggest that a similar compromise could be achieved and a levy charged on the privatised port in order to provide the money required for the upkeep of the rest of the harbour. Poole is not a deep harbour, and dredging and maintaining it costs a considerable amount of money.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport has kindly agreed to visit Poole, to see for himself the situation there. I assure him of a warm welcome, and of a very comprehensive briefing about both Poole harbour and local opinion on the Bill. I thank him in advance for taking the time to visit us, and for at least listening to our point of view.

I hope that my hon. Friend will come to Poole with an open mind. Perhaps, during his visit, he will be able to provide us with a convincing reason why the port of Poole should be privatised, as no one has yet managed to do so. It seems that this will be a case of privatisation for the sake of privatisation—not because there is any local need or desire for the port to be privatised, but because all ports are to be lumped together for the sake of some sort of harmony of policy.

I therefore put the following questions to my hon. Friend the Minister. If privatisation is to be forced on us, how are we to protect the environment? How do we ensure that local people benefit, as they have for many years, from their greatest local asset? How do we ensure that the port is not taken over by asset-strippers or by those who will wish to maximise profit at the expense of the environment, the activities of fishermen and small boat owners, and the whole local population—who benefit from the present balanced approach to management?

As trustees of a unique and beautiful harbour, the Poole harbour commissioners continually strive to achieve a harmonious existence between the numerous and often conflicting recreational, environmental and commercial interests of the harbour. In addition, the commissioners must adhere to a continuing programme of planning and investment to maintain a viable port.

I hope that I have said enough to show the grave concern felt in Poole and the surrounding area about the port and harbour falling into the hands of a commercial organisation whose sole motive will be to make a profit for its shareholders—or, worse still, into the hands of an asset-stripper who could, in a short time, ruin the work that has been accomplished over many years to protect Poole and its surroundings.

Surely there can be no finer system of port administration than the unsubsidised, self-financing trusteeship of Poole. Those of us who live there simply cannot understand why the Government seem intent on compulsory privatisation.

5.56 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): No Government have been more dogmatic or ideologically blinkered than the present Administration, and the Bill proves how difficult it is for a leopard to change its spots. It is a relic from the Thatcher era, and it comes before the House only because of the policies embarked on by the former Prime Minister, which no one can find a way of reversing.

It is strange how quickly the zeal for privatisation has faded. I expected from the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) a rip-roaring defence of the Bill and of privatisation, together with a demand that the Government should go even further. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), who has left his place, suggested that allowing two years before privatisation is too long, and that the minimum qualifying turnover of £5 million is too large. The hon. Gentleman made a rapid exit from the Chamber. Perhaps he had advance warning of the speech of the hon. Member for Poole, but I understand that he is consulting Nick Finney. Fair enough—he is perfectly entitled to do so.

Mr. Hind: A number of my hon. Friends who remain in the Chamber think that two years is too long, and are concerned that the remaining 95 ports may be allowed to do nothing and will not develop, in order to avoid pressure for privatisation. Perhaps the door should be open to all 115 ports, rather than just to those which have a turnover of more than £5 million a year.

Mr. Hughes: Now that the hon. Gentleman has made his intervention, perhaps he also will make a rapid exit from the Chamber.

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I object to any hon. or right hon. Member consulting someone who is in the Chamber but not on the Floor of the House when they are supposed to be in their place. I voice that objection whenever such an action is taken by a Labour Member, so I must do so also in the case of a Conservative Member. I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to draw attention to that undesirable practice.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) has himself drawn attention to it. His concern will have been noted by hon. Members and will, of course, be recorded in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Hughes: I do not want to interfere in private and difficult matters, but the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) raises a serious issue, and I hope that the hon. Member for Thurrock will desist from taking further advice in that way. No one could object if he chose to have a cup of tea with Mr. Finney downstairs.

No one has made any real case for the Bill. There are deficiencies in the trust ports legislation, and certain problems remain to be resolved. However, the Minister did not identify one port as being inefficiently managed or serving its area badly, making it necessary to introduce such legislation. Such deficiencies as exist could easily be remedied by minor statutory changes to free up trust ports that are bound by existing legislation that is too onerous.

The Bill clearly illustrates the narrowness of the Secretary of State's approach. There is no need for privatisation. I am advised by the Aberdeen harbour board that it totally opposes the Bill—especially the clause that imposes compulsory privatisation after two years. The board has discussed the Bill at length. The concept of privatised trust ports has been with us for some time. It has not come out of the blue, so it has been possible to give it mature consideration before reaching a point of view.

Conservative Members may be interested to know the membership of the Aberdeen harbour board. On 1 January 1991, it comprised two representatives of Grampian regional council, Councillor A. Main and Councillor A. Stuart. One representative is nominated by Aberdeen district council, Councillor H. E. Rae; one is nominated by Aberdeen chamber of commerce, Mr. D. Paton; one is nominated by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Councillor R. R. Webster.

The following members are appointed by the Secretary of State, after consultation—after consultation with the fishing industry: Mr. Patrick Lynch, managing director of North Star Fishing Company Ltd.; after consultation with the Aberdeen chamber of commerce on export and import of cargoes: Mr. Michael Horsfall, managing director of North Eastern Farmers Ltd.; after consultation with the Aberdeen Base Operators Association, operators of the oil base: Mr. Roderick Mathieson, managing director of Wood Group Offshore Ltd.; after discussion with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, the oil-related interest: Mr. Keith Allan, technical operations director of Shell Expro (Aberdeen); after consultation with the cargo-handling interests: Mr. Ramsay Pirie, the managing director of John Cook Agencies Ltd.; after consultation with the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers, shipowner or agent: Mr. Tony Peers, managing director of Seaforth Maritime Group.

The direct nomination of the Secretary of State, without statutory consultation, is Mr. John W. Cradock, who is a local businessman, and the general manager is Mr. Barclay Braithwaite. There is a total of 13 board members and if hon Members care to make the calculation, they will find that eight of the 13 are from commerce and industry and clearly look after their own interests—that is quite proper—but mainly the interests of the port and the region served by Aberdeen harbour board.

Hon. Members are entitled to ask how Aberdeen harbour board has discharged its responsibilities. For a number of years, Aberdeen has funded all port development out of revenue. In the past decade, it has spent £27 million on port maintenance and development. The board expects to spend a further £37 million in the next 10 years and to fund it from strong cash reserves and existing borrowing powers.

Aberdeen has no surplus land. Practically all its land is taken up by port facilities. The small amount of land which is not used by the port is leased to a local shipyard, A. and P. Appledore. The ownership of that land is extremely important, as it prevented the previous company, Aberdeen Shipbuilders, from asset-stripping the shipyard when it went into liquidation, having run up enormous debts in a short time. This is not the occasion to go into how those debts accummulated in such a short period, or to comment upon the financial irresponsibility demonstrated by the owners of that shipyard. I shall pass that subject by for the moment.

Aberdeen harbour board, under its current constitution, has powers to diversify into port-related work if it so wishes. Aberdeen is run in an extremely businesslike fashion. In 1988, the harbour board made a profit of £2 million, after tax, on a turnover of £10 million. That is a pretty good return of profit on turnover after tax, and in 1990 it is forecast that that return will be exceeded, although we do not yet have the accounts.

Hon. Members may think that Aberdeen has been able to make reasonable profits by continually increasing charges for use of the port, rather than through efficiency. The truth is that the main ships and goods charges increased by 5 per cent. increase since 1983. Apart from a 5 per cent. increase in 1990, there has been no increase since 1983. That is a pretty efficient output since 1983—Aberdeen has managed to maintain its level of charges and increase profits. I cannot imagine that any private industries, or indeed a privatised port, would manage to do any better.

Aberdeen has a splendid record; nothing could be used to demonstrate that the port could do better in the hands of a private company. The case speaks for itself.

The board has considered the matter for many years, but it is totally against the idea of privatisation, and it is concerned that a well-managed port, which looks after local interests, could be bought by an outside agency—outside the Aberdeen area, outside Scotland and even outside the United Kingdom. I am sure the Minister will tell me if I am wrong, but I can find nothing in the Bill which restricts the ownership of British ports to companies which have their headquarters in this country.

Let us imagine that the port of Rotterdam or some other port suddenly decided to buy Aberdeen port for its own interests. It might simply run down the port over a period of years, suck it dry of profits and go into liquidation, and then we would be in difficulties.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend may be aware that one of the conditions that we were able in Committee to put into the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, when that port was privatised, was that the headquarters of the port would always have to remain on the Tees. If that provision is lacking in this Bill, should we not work to incorporate it in Committee?

Mr. Hughes: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We certainly need to be sure that the main business is conducted from the ports when they are established. We should go further: we should write a provision into the Bill that no foreign company should be allowed to have an interest of more than a certain percentage in such a

[Mr. Hughes]

company. I do not know whether that should be 10 per cent. or 40 per cent., but the Bill should be worded so that ownership of a huge block of shares would not result in control of the company. One does not have to own 51 per cent. of the shares of a company to control it, because a block of 20 or 30 per cent. of the shares could mean that one would have control.

Aberdeen is a buoyant port. In the annual report, the chairman says:

"The cargo handled in 1989 increased to 3·22 million tonnes, the first year in the port's long history that the 3 million tonnes level has been exceeded. The shipping handled also increased to 8·89 million gross registered tonnes. Increases in commercial traffic played a large part in the rising figures, with oil-related traffic remaining strong. The difficult situation faced by the fishing industry in respect of quota reductions was reflected in the noticeable drop in white fish landings."

I quoted that because hon. Members may well take the view that the reason why Aberdeen is so buoyant is solely because of oil-related work in the North sea—for which we should be grateful. However, ordinary commercial activities in the port have been doing well and increasing. Aberdeen is a splendid port and it is living up to its reputation. Clearly, the Secretary of State should leave well alone.

When the Minister replies to the debate, will he answer a question which I asked the Secretary of State in an intervention? What would happen to trust ports which hitherto have had access to grants for capital works? The Secretary of State said that that was theoretical. The fact is that, for a number of years, no trust port has had any money from the Government for development. That is not what I call theoretical. It is the practical effect of how the Government have dealt with their relationship with trust ports.

Setting out a prospectus is quite a different matter. In the Bill, we must make the position clear about grants for capital developments to prospective purchasers of trust ports. They must be clearly told—I believe that this is intended in the Bill—that, once they become private companies, they will be dependent upon the market for raising money for capital work, either through revenue or borrowing. My question must be answered in the House.

The Bill had nothing to do with ports policy—Conservative Members understand that only too well—but everything to do with the problems that the Government have got themselves into over the abolition of the dock labour scheme. I do not want to go over all the ground again; let me simply say that I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). We all had discussions with the port employers and others involved in industry, and they all said that they were not going hell for leather to ensure the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

I well remember having discussions, as Labour's transport spokesman, with Nick Finney, director of the National Association of Port Employers—NAPE. I hope he will not feel that I have broken a confidence—not that it matters much now; it is all water under the bridge. He asked me, before the general election of, I think, 1983—elections come and go so quickly—whether I would be prepared to use my good offices to set up a "consultation conference" involving both employers and unions, to discuss the deficiences of the dock labour scheme and the possibility of improving it in a way that would allay the dockers' fears about casualisation and uncertainty of employment. It was felt that the two sides could be brought together for the good of ports policy and the nation in general. Then, suddenly, we were presented with a Bill to abolish the scheme.

The Government estimate that, in the two years following enactment of the Bill, they will gain £30 million to £50 million from the levy. It has been explained, quite properly, that no one knows how many ports will opt for privatisation, and that the proceeds are therefore also unknown; but £30 million to £50 million is considered a reasonable estimate. Other estimates, however, put the value of the trust ports much higher: some think that, given existing sales and the future development value of land that is sold off, the levy could make the Government as much as £200 million. I do not know the true figure, but I should like to hear the Secretary of State's prediction of the values and the long-term gain.

The Bill is designed for the sole purpose of recouping some of the losses resulting from the abolition of the dock labour scheme, which was disastrous for the Government's coffers. The Minister may shake his head, but we were solemnly told at the time of the abolition Bill that the cost to the Government would be approximately £25 million—and that would be the Government's share; the other £25 million, representing the total cost of redundancy payments, would be met by the employers.

The only trouble was, a nice, fat, juicy loophole was left in the Bill. If a stevedoring company went into liquidation, who picked up the tab? The Government had to pick up 100 per cent. of the redundancy costs, not just the amount that they had promised; they had to pay the employers' share as well. That juicy little loophole cost the Government an estimated £135 million, five times the estimate in the Bill.

That is financial mismanagement of the grossest kind. If a local authority, having estimated that a measure would cost £25 million, acted so badly and irresponsibly that the eventual cost was five times as much, it would be hauled through the courts and its members disqualified for life—but not this Government: they get away with such behaviour by sweeping it under the carpet as though it were some minor peccadillo that could be easily forgotten.

What did the Government say when challenged—by, I believe, the Public Accounts Committee—about their gross underestimate? Their lame excuse was, "Well, we took the Bill through in a hurry, and the financial costs were difficult to predict." That came from a Government who try to pretend that they can conduct their business better than the Labour party, and that the taxpayer's finances, rather than tame ideology, are the first thought in their mind. The truth is that the Bill is intended to recoup money and cover up the deficiencies of the past.

At its best, the Bill could be described as a scatter gun, intended to resolve a problem that no one has ever spelt out. Such problems can be dealt with in other ways. No example has been given of a single trust port whose circumstances required the introduction of such legislation. The existing deficiencies could easily have been sorted out by other means; the Government should take account of the national interest. Nothing has been said about port strategy or port organisation, apart from the Secretary of State's throwaway remark that ports would still be needed after the opening of the Channel tunnel. That was a

brilliant flash of insight: I suspect that it was furnished by the excellent QC's mind that he brings to bear on such issues.

Of course there will still be ports when the Channel tunnel is in operation; but, as the Secretary of State well knows, the tunnel will have a major influence on port developments in this country. He has said nothing about that. I believe that the Bill is completely unnecessary, and full of blinkered ideology: I shall certainly vote against it.

6.16 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): First, let me welcome the Bill and congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on making such progress so early in 1991. Secondly, I join other hon. Members in expressing my concern about the notion of the Exchequer's taking 50 per cent. of the proceeds of any sale of shares in a privatised port. I do not quarrel with the notion of a 50 per cent. clawback on the sale of land owned by a port; I see the validity of that, and understand my right hon. and learned Friend's argument justifying a half share in the proceeds from the disposal of shares. Nevertheless, I am not happy about the position, and I should like to say more about it later.

My third point concerns the turnover figure of £5 million, which I think should be rather lower. A turnover of £1 million would bring in only another eight or nine ports, so a lowering of the figures would not be significant. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has said that he intends to apply index-linking and that the £5 million turnover is not intended to bring in other ports by virtue of the effects of inflation; he says that the figure will rise, but, as I said, I should prefer it to be lowered.

Opposition Members have expressed their objections. It gives me great joy to be able to quote my very good friend, the socialist chairman of Great Yarmouth borough council's economic development committee, who welcomed the prospect of the privatisation of the port of Great Yarmouth. I have a cutting from a local newspaper to that effect. My friend was also the Labour party candidate for Great Yarmouth in the general election. If he had won, there is no doubt that he would have done nearly as good a job for the constituency as I do; let us leave aside the fact that the election of a Labour Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth would of course mean a Labour Government, a disaster which I am sure none of us will ever have to contemplate.

To be fair, John Cannell, the chairman of Great Yarmouth borough council's economic development committee, believes that the ideal solution would be for the port to be municipalised. If a Labour Government were returned to power, he says that he would press them to allow local authorities to run ports. Such an odd view would find little favour elsewhere in Great Yarmouth. John Cannell said:

> "The port authority would need to have the confidence of its major users in relation to the policies that have been carried out over the years. What interests us as a borough council is that the changes to the port should be of benefit to the town as it is the major source of revenue."

All of us in Great Yarmouth agree about that. I repeat what John Cannell said:

> "The changes to the port should be of benefit to the town as it is the major source of revenue."

The report draws attention to the £5 million turnover and ends by saying:

> "At present Yarmouth's turnover is about £4·5 million, but Mr. Cannell"—

my Labour opponent in 1987—

> "added that this governmental figure could be subject to amendment in the future."

His positive approach is in marked contrast to the negative approach that is always adopted by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) when transport issues are discussed.

I welcome the Bill. However, I do not believe that to privatise everything is good. Some take the view that if something moves, or even stands still, it should be privatised. I have not liked that element of Conservative party thinking during the last 20 years.

Mr. Robert Hughes: What has happened to the Thatcherite zeal that the hon. Gentleman exhibited at the last election? The manifesto promised to privatise everything that moved. Why has he suddenly changed his mind?

Mr. Carttiss: I have not suddenly changed my mind. Like me, the hon. Gentleman is a member of a political party. Therefore, one tries to persuade one's party to do the things in which one most firmly believes. However, the speed and direction in which one goes may be slightly faster than one likes. I do not know how any hon. Member can criticise me by saying that I am less than enthusiastic about every privatisation measure. Such a curious intervention deflects me from my main point and will incur your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I say too much about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) said that he objected to the element of compulsion in the Bill. He asked for more flexibility. He suggested that we should take more account of local circumstances and views. He made an eloquent appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport. If the privatisation of the ports brings the benefits that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State outlined—and I believe that it will—those benefits should be self-evident. Local people should be allowed to decide for themselves. It is an enabling Bill. My right hon. and learned Friend is allowing time for discussions to be held. My port is not covered by the Bill.

Mr. McLoughlin: Any trust port can become a private company. The only element of compulsion, as the Bill is drafted, applies to those ports with an annual turnover of more than £5 million. The Bill as drafted will not prevent the port of Great Yarmouth from seeking privatised status.

Mr. Carttiss: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): If the hon. Gentleman is satisfied that there will be compulsion only when a port has a turnover of more than £5 million, will he withdraw what he said about being in favour of the £5 million limit being lowered so that his port of Great Yarmouth can also be compulsorily privatised?

Mr. Carttiss: I expressed sympathy with the strong arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole when he applied them to Poole. His arguments have merit and should be examined. However, unlike my hon.

[Mr. Carttiss]

Friend the Member for Poole, I should not be averse to an element of compulsion if ports have a turnover of less than £5 million.

The port of Great Yarmouth currently reinvests its entire annual surplus of £1 million in quayside piling, costing £8,000 per metre. It has a rolling programme that covers its 8,000 m of quay. It also reinvests its money in the provision of plant to encourage the handling of general cargo. Tomorrow morning, the port authority will officially open a warehouse that it has provided to generate more cargo traffic in Norfolk. Such port facilities do not always attract an immediate return on the initial investment. They may not therefore be an obvious subject for privatisation. The trust port is concerned about long-term developments that may not lead to immediate investment returns but that nevertheless should be carried out in the interests of the community.

The trust port ploughs all its surplus income back into the port to create facilities for port users. The first priority of a private company is its shareholders' dividends. After a compulsory purchase, a problem might arise if a single user bought the port. I refer to a private company, a group of ports, a property developer or a foreign purchaser. There would be no certainty that the paramount interests of the community could be protected. That is one reason why the statutory port trust was established in the first place. The Bill's enabling and reserve powers provide no protection. We may need to consider that point further in Committee.

We should consider what happened when the former statutory water company in Great Yarmouth was privatised. It is now under French ownership. The last thing I want is the French buying up the port of Great Yarmouth. They bought Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft water company and merged it with Essex water company. The one thing that we dislike in Yarmouth more than having the water company owned by the French is the fact that it is now called Suffolk Water plc.

Mr. Janman: For the past two or three years, the water that has come out of our taps in Essex has been French-owned and has not seemed any the worse for it. Will my hon. Friend expand further on what he means by benefits to the community? Surely the main objective of a port is to ensure that it benefits its customers. Conservative Members believe that the best way of achieving that is for management to be accountable to shareholders. To enable them to pay a better dividend, management will try to maximise profits by giving customers a better service. Why does he think that those two things are not compatible?

Mr. Carttiss: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will have an opportunity to make his speech and to enlarge on his concerns. I am talking about the possibility of a single company purchasing a trust port and operating it in its own interests.

Great Yarmouth is the major port on the east coast for the offshore oil and gas industries. It services oil rigs in the southern sector of the North sea. The northern sector is serviced by Aberdeen, which developed and blossomed from our experience in Great Yarmouth. The oil and gas industries and the shipping that serves them are vital to the operation of the port. I would not want an offshore oil company to buy the port and to make the offshore industry the pre-eminent concern of the port. That might be in the interests of shareholders, but it would not be in the interests of the community for the port to lose its general cargo-handling activity.

One of our major port users is the roll-on/roll-off ferry between Great Yarmouth and Scheveningen, the port of The Hague. Two ships daily are run by the Maersk Company-owned Norfolk Line. Although I would be pleased for it to be more involved in the port, I would not want the port to be run for the benefit of the ferry and to the exclusion of the important work of the offshore industry.

Lowestoft has become the major fishing port in our area. However, companies that operate oil rigs, gas platforms or roll-on/roll-off ferries are not interested in fishermen. In the interests of the community, the port must have some commitment to those fishermen. That deals with the points of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), but I shudder to think what would happen if the French took over.

The General Council of British Shipping has written to most hon. Members. In its letter, it expresses its concern that

"ports may exploit their monopoly position over their captive customers in order to maximise revenue. Oil refineries and other waterside industrial plant are effectively totally captive."

It makes a further point that is relevant to the point that I have been making:

"There is likely to be a trend towards port takeovers and concentration, thus reducing further the restraining influence of inter-port competition. Already about one quarter of UK seaborne trade is handled by the private company Associated British Ports."

The neighbouring port of Lowestoft, six or seven miles south, is owned by Associated British Ports. The port of King's Lynn, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), who is working diligently in front of me in support of the Department of Transport, is owned by Associated British Ports. I do not object to King's Lynn or Lowestoft being owned by Associated British Ports, and I am sure that it has done a marvellous job, but it would not be good for Yarmouth and the three or four other ports that operate on the east coast to be part of that one group.

I was grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene when he said that trust ports are not answerable to the Government. That is one of their good features. Anything that is not answerable to the Government, of whatever particular hue, must be commended. I was sent here to ensure that the number of things that are answerable to the Government are reduced. It is one of my unhappinesses that, despite being an absolutely rabid Thatcherite, over the past 10 or 11 years we have been too much inclined to increase the role of Government, which does not fit with some of the things that we are supposed to be doing.

The Secretary of State said that trust ports are not answerable to the Government. That is a damned good thing. I object most strongly, therefore, to the 50 per cent. levy on the proceeds. The Government have done absolutely nothing for the port of Great Yarmouth in its more than 500 years of existence. We have not had a penny piece from them. We even have difficulty getting money for flood protection. Much of the work that is done shoring up

the quaysides is related to the flood protection of Great Yarmouth, in particular the low-lying area that we know as Cobholm.

We have hell's own job—excuse my language; I should say that we have great difficulty, but people in Yarmouth will understand what I mean—in getting enough money from the Anglian water authority, as it was, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for essential flood protection work. The cost of that has been borne by the port of Great Yarmouth. The Government are saying, "We want you to be commercial, more energetic in the private enterprise field," and they want 50 per cent. of the money when they have not given us a penny.

In Committee or on Third Reading, I shall quote Members of Parliament for Great Yarmouth who have complained about the failure of successive Kings and Queens, from Elizabeth I onwards, to put a penny piece into the port of Great Yarmouth. Indeed, in the time of Henry VIII we had to contribute to the port of Dover.

Clawing back money from land sales is fair enough—the port of Yarmouth has no land to sell because it belongs to the borough council—but for the Government to claw back 50 per cent. of the proceeds when they have never done a thing for the port of Great Yarmouth is quite wrong, and I shall oppose it until the very end, although I am delighted to support the general aims of the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I hope that those who are called will bear that in mind.

6.38 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful for being called so early and to follow the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), who made an interesting and fluent speech on behalf of his constituents. I was struck by his remark that he would shudder to think what would happen if the French took over the port of Great Yarmouth. We in Tees and Hartlepool would shudder to think what would happen to any Frenchman who tried to take over the port of Hartlepool, given what allegedly happened there to a Frenchman during the Napoleonic wars. They hanged him, but, as it happened, it turned out to be a monkey.

When the hon. Gentleman referred to Henry VIII, I was reminded of how the House had chided my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) for his reference to the Rochdale report. "How far back was that?" my hon. Friend was asked. The answer is 25 years. Surely my hon. Friend may be forgiven for going back 25 years when an hon. Member has just gone back to the time of Henry VIII. I am sure that the Government will not seek to claw anything back from the port of Great Yarmouth—should it be privatised—in respect of the time of Henry VIII. In the case of Tees and Hartlepool, they clawed back 50 per cent. and then capital gains tax on some very small amounts paid in the early 1960s.

The interesting point, the real thrust of this debate, concerns how the Government have lost their way in relation to privatisation. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East, in his peroration, touched on this point. The Government now see privatisation as a source of finance rather than as ideology. They see privatisation as a means of financing their own recession rather than as a means of bringing free market benefits to the community.

Mr. Moate *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman protests. Let him look at the facts. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) in his place. He made a very important intervention during the speech of the Secretary of State—a point touched upon briefly by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who, although he is not in the Chamber at the moment, will probably we well and truly involved in the Committee stage debate.

The Secretary of State pointed out that the Bill would make possible the privatisation of 14 major trust ports—in fact 12, as Tees and Hartlepool and the ports of the Clyde are already being privatised via the private Bill route. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), with his usual diligence, has been sitting through this debate. He has pointed out that the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill will have its Second Reading debate in another place tomorrow.

Ports that have an annual turnover of £5 million will not fall within the terms of clause 9, which, according to the explanatory and financial memorandum,

"enables the Secretary of State, after an initial period of 2 years, to give a direction requiring the authority to bring forward a scheme for the purposes of"

privatisation.

That brings me back to a point made by the hon. Member for Thurrock. In an intervention the hon. Gentleman asked the Secretary of State to consider introducing in Committee stage an amendment to reduce the amount from £5 million to £1 million and to reduce the period from two years to one year. There is no doubt that the hon. Gentleman—I give him credit for this—was wearing his ideological running shoes. It is an ideological point. It would be perfectly right for an ideological Government to reduce the period to one year, and the amount to £1 million. However, the Secretary of State was not wearing his ideological shoes; he was wearing the running shoes provided by the Treasury. His speech was a Treasury speech. The Treasury has made its calculations.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman mentioned my earlier intervention. What is the whole crux of this operation? It is not simply about the Treasury getting as much money as it can; as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, it is about what to do to encourage investment, productivity and competitiveness in the ports industry. If one thinks that having plcs—the other two options being trusts and fully nationalised ports—would be the best way of achieving increased investment, surely there is no need to delay the matter. In addition, as many ports as possible should be compelled to come forward in the shortest possible period and take up the benefits of such a structure.

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman anticipates a great deal of what I am going to say. I have been trying to make the point that trust ports did not previously have constraints. Indeed, they were able to invest. They were able to benefit the local community and there was never any need for an ideological commitment to privatisation. I shall deal with all these points at a later stage.

Obviously the Treasury made its calculations. It calculated, no doubt correctly, that the real money lies in

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the assets and in the capital gains tax of the 12 major trust ports rather than in the other 100 or so ports, small as they are—my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston on Hull, East called them minnows—that are also covered by the Bill. If the Secretary of State is still an ideologue of the free market—perhaps his years as Secretary of State for Scotland diluted that commitment—he may well take the advice of the hon. Members for Thurrock and for Lancashire, West, both of whom, I hope, will be on the Standing Committee. If the Secretary of State is ideologically committed, he will accept the suggestions.

Of course, the money that is available in the case of the 100 or so trust ports, less the 12 to which I have referred, is so small that the Treasury is not required to intervene. Therefore, the Secretary of State will not intervene. But the Treasury has gone a little further in its thinking and its analysis. It saw the prospect of 50 per cent. of assets going and the prospect of capital gains tax on the remaining 50 per cent., and now it sees the prospect of a clawback provision in respect of the sale of land. In this regard, I shall deal later with the intervention of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh.

Clause 16, according to the explanatory and financial memorandum,

"makes provision for a levy on gains accruing to a successor company as a result of certain disposals of any land or interest in land that is transferred to the company".

We see the Treasury very much at work here—in respect of the 50 per cent., in respect of the capital gains tax and, now, in respect of the sale of land by the successor company.

The hon. Member asked the Secretary of State whether this clause would affect the legislation privatising the port of Tees and Hartlepool. He wanted to know, in short, whether there would be a clawback provision. The Secretary of State's answer, to which we shall hold him, was that there would not be. Thus there is possibly some reward for Tees and Hartlepool for having taken the private Bill route of privatisation.

But the hon. Member for Langbaurgh may not have seen the other side of the assurance. The fact is that the levy will be based on the price only—not on the price of the market value. The situation may turn out to be that, while the 50 per cent. levy in respect of ports privatised under this legislation is based on price only—the Secretary of State was very clear about that point—it may be on price or on market value in the case of Tees and Hartlepool. Thus, there may be a loss for Tees and Hartlepool. In that case, the port may find that what it gains on the swings of the clawback it will lose on the roundabout of market values.

I wish to develop a theme mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. In his peroration, he talked about the Treasury getting its hands on the booty. As I am a little more romantic, I shall refer to pots of gold rather than booty. The Treasury sees pots of gold dotted around the country. It realises that we are in a recession and that its receipts from taxation are falling. On another occasion the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport told us that the Government did not have sufficient legislative time to introduce a Bill to privatise the trust ports. However, when the Treasury saw the benefits, the Government were suddenly able to find the time. So I am not entirely uncomfortable with the argument that there is not the unseen hand of Adam Smith but certainly the unseen hand of the Treasury behind these proposals.

Mr. McLoughlin: The point that I was making at the time to which the hon. Gentleman refers was indeed that the Government did not have time for a public Bill. However, we are now in a new Session of Parliament, and this proposal was included in the Gracious Speech. That does not detract from what I said at the time of the passage of the private Bills.

Mr. Bell: Let me quote what the Minister said:

"It is still our intention to bring forward Government legislation on trust ports at the earliest convenient opportunity. But given the pressure on the legislative programme, private legislation is the only way by which these ports can quickly be converted into fully fledged private sector enterprises."

On that occasion the Minister was talking as a member of a Government who had too tight a programme to permit intervention by way of a new Bill. When we were talking in the House about the Tees and Hartlepool privatisation, no one suggested that 50 per cent. of the authority's assets would be taken from it, and the hon. Member for Langbaurgh, who sponsored that Bill, knows that full well. Treasury counsel said in Committee that the Treasury proposed taking 50 per cent. of the assets.

I accept that privatisation is a legitimate part of the Government's programme. They won a general election on that mandate. As I repeated in the House on 15 March,

"The concept of privatisation is legitimate. It was an ideological commitment that the Conservative party made at the time of the 1979 election."

The former Minister for Aviation and Shipping, now Minister for Shipping and Public Transport, said that the Government wanted 50 per cent. of the assets because of Treasury input many years ago through grants, and that it was therefore legitimate for the Treasury later to say that it wanted to claw back some of the money. I disagree with the principle that some small grants given in the 1960s should result in 50 per cent. of a company's assets being taken from it.

The Secretary of State was able to handle my intervention when I said that the situation had changed. He said that it would be wrong for a successor company to have the full benefit of a 100 per cent. sale of assets. But 50 per cent. of those assets are going to the Government. The Government want to ensure that the Treasury will not be undernourished because of the sale of the trust ports. Clause 9 enables the Secretary of State, after an initial period of two years, to give a direction requiring an authority to bring forward a scheme

"for the purposes of a transfer".

The Secretary of State will not be happy with the value set upon such a company unless he is satisfied that that is its proper value. The Treasury will get its 50 per cent. and is working hard behind the scenes.

The Tees and Hartlepool port authority may have a lot to answer for. Ideological commitment made the former Secretary of State for Transport say that he wanted the trust ports to turn themselves into companies and to go private. On 15 March 1990, the present Minister for Shipping and Public Transport said:

"That was why, as has been mentioned already, about a year ago my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), when he was Secretary of State for

Transport, encouraged trust ports which saw benefits in turning themselves into companies to bring forward their own private Bills."

The Tees and Hartlepool port authority followed that encouragement and moved forward on the privatisation road. It may have a lot to answer for, but little to show for its precipitate move to beat its competitors—the purpose behind the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. The Bill that we are debating may reach the statute book before the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, notwithstanding the fact that its legislative start means that it will be considered in the other place tomorrow night. The authority has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on this procedure—money held in trust for the state.

We have heard much about the state owning the trust ports. The state is you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and me and other hon. Members. We are the beneficiaries of having trust ports and of a system going back 180 years, as the hon. Member for Langbaurgh reminded us, and we are the beneficiaries of stable ports. The Secretary of State told us that 90 per cent. of our imports still come through the trust ports. The Tees and Hartlepool port authority has thrown away hundreds of thousands of pounds on its privatisation Bill, to little effect, as is shown by the fact that we are debating this enabling Bill only a few weeks after the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill completed its proceedings in the House of Commons.

The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth talked about 50 per cent which I would point out, in the case of the Tees and Hartlepool authority, lest we lose ourselves in percentages, comes to £32 million. In addition, there will be a loss on the capital gains. The Government's ideology of free enterprise and a free market is being set aside and the Treasury is putting its long arm into the pockets of the trust ports. That does not bode well for the other 12 trust ports, including Newcastle and Blyth, which are likely to be privatised over the next two years.

In introducing the Bill, the Secretary of State talked about a constraint on the activities of trust ports. He was reading again from his brief, but he must have overlooked an exchange on Second Reading of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh was making the same point as the Secretary of State, but my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said:

"in 1984-85, the port authority did not feel that it was bound by the alleged restriction and invested in property, finance, aviation, air travel, timber importing, transport, display signs, storage, security fencing and engineering."

All those investments were carried out by Tees and Hartlepool as a trust port. We made the point then, as we do again tonight, that the trust port had the authority to carry out all that investment, if it wished—even in a fish and chip shop, a business to which the hon. Member for Langbaurgh has already referred.

So that the record is clear and we all know the role of the present Minister for Shipping and Public Transport, I shall again quote from his speech on 15 March 1990, when he said:

"There is a general rule that when assets acquired or improved by a non-Exchequer body with the aid of Government grants are disposed of, an appropriate proportion of the proceeds should go to the Exchequer."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 733-62.]

That rule was set side, as was shown by statements by Treasury counsel in Committee on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and then in the proceedings on the Finance Bill, when the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) played an important role. Sections 115 to 120 of the Finance Act 1990 extend this principle.

As I said in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), in Committee on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill we won a commitment from the authority that its headquarters would be on Teesside. We welcome that commitment, and in Committee on this Bill we shall look for a similar commitment in respect of other trust ports. It is not good enough to create a framework in which the ports can be taken over by successor companies which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North said, may have their headquarters in Amsterdam. Even though the trust ports are privatised, we want a local community spirit, which can be achieved by a provision in the Bill stating that an authority's headquarters should be where the port is situated.

In referring to the 14 ports, the Secretary of State touched on the Tyne, which is an important port. If it is privatised, we shall look for the same assurances for which we looked in the debate on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. We shall want to know what assurances there are that shares will go to staff and to local pension funds. We welcome the emphasis on employee participation, but 50 per cent. of the work force lost their jobs because of the abolition of the dock labour scheme. The concept of the docker—a proud profession going back over 100 years—was replaced by the concept of the unskilled labourer.

Mr. Holt: I know of the hon. Gentleman's keen interest in this matter, and both he and the people of Teesside know of mine. Will the hon. Gentleman take it from me that I have yet to receive one letter from an employee of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority objecting to the private Bill that I sponsored?

Mr. Bell: I think that it was President Nixon who coined the phrase "the silent majority". Perhaps the silent majority were not communicating with the hon. Gentleman.

I worked hard to ensure that those who were unhappy with the proposals following the abolition of the dock labour scheme received proper redundancy money and could retire from the profession in which they had worked happily for many years, enjoying the exercise of their skills. We shall be looking for the worker participation to which I have referred if proposals are advanced in respect of the Tyne.

When the Minister winds up, he may wish to touch on this question: what emphasis was placed, in the Government's study of the Bill, on the development of commerce and jobs following the privatisation of the trust ports? Did those factors enter into the reckoning? Has there been any indication of what the prospects will be? The hon. Member for Thurrock referred to that matter earlier. We shall be calling for all that information when we examine the Bill in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North said that the Bill was the legacy of the Thatcher years, and clearly it is. It is a hard-faced Bill dealing with financial rather than with port matters. However, it may bring to an end—I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would welcome this—the corruption of the private Bill procedure that characterised the Thatcher Administration. The then

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Minister for Aviation and Shipping told the House frankly, honestly and clearly that the matter was properly the subject of Government legislation but that, as no Government time was available, the private Bill route had had to be taken.

That corruption of the private Bill procedure cost the House many hours of debate and much tension and aggravation. It will cause the same reaction in the other place. The same happened with the Clyde Port Authority Bill. I hope that that corruption of our procedures is now a thing of the past and that the new Administration will not so take the House of Commons for granted as to corrupt our proceedings in that way.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, the Government's ideological commitment to privatisation is enfeebled and diluted and their policy has not necessarily succeeded. As my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) once said, any fool can sell assets at half their value. The Government are now insisting on getting the full value of the assets so that the Treasury can take its 50 per cent. and so that they can nibble away at the financial consequences of the recession. In ideological terms, the Bill is poor and ill thought out. The Minister knows as well as I do that it is a Treasury measure—a financial measure which arises from the Finance Act 1990. That is why the Opposition will vote against it.

7.4 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): In principle, I welcome the Bill, which has much to commend it to my constituents. It is certainly important to my constituency, as 10,000 people there are employed in work relating directly or indirectly to the activities of Dover port.

Dover is a most successful port and I commend its management and employees for the successful way in which it has grown up in the past decade and more. It has coped with the enormous expansion of trade that has resulted from the Government's policies and is extremely efficient, dealing with twice the volume of traffic—in terms of tonnage and of passengers—that it dealt with 10 years ago. Dover has invested a considerable amount in information technology to ensure that it is a modern port with modern facilities to provide for the speedy transfer of passengers and to enable them to enjoy all that it has to offer.

The port is indeed an enjoyable area. New restaurant and shopping facilities have been provided to ensure that passengers' holidays and recreational visits are as enjoyable as possible. Both for the lorry driver transferring freight abroad and for the passenger looking forward to his or her holiday, it is an extremely successful port.

Dover's interests in privatisation are numerous. In particular, we should bear in mind the policy of the local council as Dover prepares itself for the changes that are likely to result from the opening of the channel tunnel. It is the council's policy to expand tourism and leisure opportunities in Dover and east Kent, and that expansion cannot take place without the greater freedom resulting from privatisation of the port. Various developments have been proposed for Wellington docks and parts of Dover port, and privatisation, or the transfer of the port's undertakings to a limited company, will facilitate them. I look forward to the potential that Dover will enjoy if privatisation enables us to develop the leisure and tourism facilities that will make us a successful area over the next 20 or 30 years.

Access to financial markets will be improved in respect of companies that are privatised. There will be considerable opportunities for expanding the port and its undertakings and operations. Such access to capital may not be so readily available to ports that remain trust ports.

With the channel tunnel coming on stream in 1993, the timetable is a particular problem for Dover, and I understand that the Minister has said publicly that Dover may not be forced to privatise at the same rate as ports elsewhere. If the channel tunnel has not yet opened, and if it is not known how much trade will be taken away as a result of its opening, it will be difficult to issue a prospectus or tender document. With the channel tunnel offering such an expensive route to the continent, however, we hope to keep the vast majority of our trade, if not all of it. We certainly intend to fight hard in the competitive marketplace to ensure that that happens.

The other aspect of the privatisation measure that needs to be tested in Committee—I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about it—is the hope that management and employees may bid successfully for many of the ports' undertakings. It is important to ensure that there is a level playing field. When we examine the 50 per cent. levy and the financial structures, we may find that there is not, and that management and employees will not have the same opportunities to buy the port as ferry companies or other corporate bodies. Especially in respect of ports as important to the local community as Dover is, it will be important to ensure that each of the interested parties has a fair opportunity to submit a successful bid.

I am also concerned about the 50 per cent. levy. I differ from Opposition Members because I believe that the levy is a small amount of money. The amount of money that the levy will raise is inconsequential within the totality of Government spending. There are always some Government Departments—we know which ones and I do not need to name them—that always look for the last £10 million, £15 million, £20 million or £30 million. However, we must bear in mind the fact that the ports have been paying a great deal by way of corporation tax over the years and a great deal of national insurance contributions have also been paid.

As hon. Members have said, the Government have done quite well out of the ports and they do not deserve to be sticking their little hand into the pot on this occasion. I remain to be convinced whether the levy should be 50 per cent. or whether it should exist at all. Ministers must examine their consciences—and perhaps a bit more than their consciences—before they claim that the levy is right and proper in the circumstances.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government are justifying a form of asset stripping by proposing the levy? That is clearly unacceptable to the Opposition, and I am sure that it is unacceptable to many Conservative Members. The Bill will be challenged and I hope that the next Labour Government will have proposals about public ownership to ensure that those assets are returned to the community.

Mr. Shaw: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about asset stripping. My major concern is whether the

Government will achieve their objective of constructing a level playing field between, on the one hand, the employees who might want to bid with management to own the port in which they work and, on the other, a company which might be able to enjoy tax advantages. A company with that potential might be able to make a higher bid. I hope to examine that point further and to take advice from outside about it. The Government should take such advice, too.

In most privatisations the Government normally appoint a financial adviser and they determine the financial structures with the assistance of that adviser. The adviser is usually an eminent merchant bank or firm of accountants which has expertise and experience in that area. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us about the extent of the financial advice that has been taken and whether that advice was on the industry in general or on individual ports.

Although some ports might be able to afford a 50 per cent. levy and such a levy might be appropriate for some ports, the levy might be inappropriate for ports such as Dover, bearing in mind the fact that considerable capital expenditure will be required over the next decade to keep Dover at the forefront of the market and in a position in which it can compete successfully against the channel tunnel.

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend is homing in on an important point. When I first examined the Bill, my gut instinct about the levy was the same as that expressed by him. However, if the levy was reduced, more cash would appear on the balance sheet of the new company. Would that increase the price that would have to be paid, thus making it more difficult for an employee-management buy-out, which, I believe from my hon. Friend's comments, both he and I would want to be encouraged?

Mr. Shaw: I accept that point, but from my experience of accountancy and mercant banking, it would be possible for a bidder to put up quite a lot of cash, for quite a lot of cash to enter the balance sheet and then for that cash to be returned, especially if the funding arrangements used some form of debt, debenture stock or even redeemable preference shares. As a result, the cash might not be left in the port's balance sheet. Instead, it might be removed by the controlling purchaser. I believe that we should all consider the matter in greater detail. By the time that the Bill reaches Committee, we will have had an opportunity to take more financial advice from the various bodies interested in the Bill and to examine what the levy means for capital structures.

I want to look at some long-term projections about what might happen to the port in my constituency and the effect of the levy on the price that might be paid for the port. If the levy was lower, there might be higher bids for the port. However, a lower levy might not change the bidding process at all. As most people with experience of share valuations will know, valuations tend to be based on profits and the amount of extra cash entering a balance sheet would, in this instance, have only a marginal effect on the valuation of ports that are relatively profitable. In the case of Dover, the extra few million pounds would probably not be as significant as the overall value of the port, which might be £50 million or £60 million. I am worried about the levy. We must consider what effect it might have.

I have seen calculations which show that the port authority could make capital losses when transferring the port's undertakings into the port company. If capital losses were made, would that loss be offset against the corporation tax paid by the existing harbour board or authority, or would it be usable as a capital loss in the subsequent company? That would mean an uneven playing field for the corporate bidder for a port against the management and employee buy-out. The Government might be thwarted in their declared aim of trying to ensure that management and employees have a beneficial opportunity of purchasing the port.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): Last year I spent three and a half hours in the House debating the privatisation of ports and, in deference to other hon. Members, I will not be making a speech tonight.

In March 1988 the Secretary of State for Transport made it clear that he was unhappy about the responses to the privatisation of the trust ports. Dover and many other ports were not keen on privatisation because under the legislation there were no powers to invest, expand and improve and there were no inhibitions on competition between ports. However, when I referred to the 50 per cent. levy last year as a rip-off, Conservative Members —including the Minister—interpreted the levy not as a take for the Treasury, but as a gain for the port.

I cannot understand the dichotomy in that thinking. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is genuinely expressing concern, but the Government's official stance last year was that what was left was a gain for the port authority. I have news for the hon. Gentleman. In addition to the 50 per cent. levy, another 17·5 per cent. in the form of taxation must be taken into account. That means that well over 65 per cent. will be removed when the sale of those ports takes place.

Mr. Shaw: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and most other hon. Members will appreciate that the gist of my point is that the Government are entitled, on behalf of the taxpayer, to put their snout in the trough. However, in this instance we want to ensure that the amount that the Government take from that trough is limited to a fair amount and that something is left for those who work in and expect to make a livelihood from the port over the next decade or so.

I was worried when the 50 per cent. levy was passed by Parliament last year, although, at that time, there was no question of its affecting my port. I believe that we must consider the point carefully now and discover whether the Government have the right figure. We must also consider the implications. So far, I have seen no financial projections that consider the implications and what might happen.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): If I remember rightly, the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Committee that considered the Electricity Bill. I remember the Government's proposals on the electricity industry levy, but I do not remember the hon. Gentleman supporting what we said about the levy. However, he is now seizing the opportunity more or less to say to the Government, "Come off it. You are charging too much." The hon. Gentleman never said a flipping word in Committee about the levy on the electricity industry. Why is he facing two ways?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and I spent many enjoyable hours together in Committee considering the Electricity Bill. He knows full well that my view at the time was that the Opposition had absolutely no credibility in their case on electricity privatisation. The Opposition's arguments have failed and they have been proved to be totally wrong by the fact that 12 million people in this country wanted a bit of the electricity privatisation. That was a substantial number.

Mr. Haynes: But at the same time, we strongly recommended that the nuclear side should not be privatised. The hon. Gentleman went along with the privatisation of the nuclear side of the industry, but, finally, the Government decided to back off and take it out. What about that, then?

Mr. Shaw: Although that is not strictly relevant to the Bill——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not go down that avenue this evening.

Mr. Shaw: I would not dream of going down that path. Under socialism, the true costs of the nuclear industry were not known. It was only later, after the Bill had been considered in Committee, that the Conservative Government and the Conservative party managed to discover the true costs——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now abusing the time allotted to him. Perhaps he will continue with his Second Reading speech.

Mr. Leadbitter *rose*——

Mr. Shaw: I take your point, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was hoping to give way one more time. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

Mr. Leadbitter: On that point.

Mr. Shaw: I shall give way very briefly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is relevant.

Mr. Leadbitter: The hon. Gentleman knows that I chaired the Committee that considered the Electricity Bill. I heard not a single word of criticism about the take. The hon. Gentleman is expressing reservations about this Bill. I respect that, but he is voicing his concern only because the matter affects Dover, which he represents.

Mr. Shaw: I assure the hon. Gentleman that electricity and the port of Dover affect Dover and my constituents. The different issue in this case is that the electricity levy was of nowhere near the same significance or proportion. It was for a totally different purpose. Here we are involved with something substantial—50 per cent. It is a capital up-front payment.

The other point which is different is that, in the case of the electricity privatisation, I was satisfied that the Government had financial advisers, I was satisfied with the figure work that was going into it and I was satisfied with the way in which the Government presented the privatisation. I hope to be satisfied with the way in which the Government are handling this privatisation. I am satisfied with most aspects of the Government's presentation of the privatisation argument, but I remain to be convinced on the issue of capital structures and the effect that the 50 per cent. levy, which is substantial, will have. If I am selected to serve on the Committee, I shall be able to make substantial points to the Minister about the 50 per cent. levy and whether it should be changed.

Another oddity of the Bill is that it does not address the monopoly powers of the Crown Estate Commissioners who own land offshore. In the case of some ports that land offshore may be within the port. In the case of Dover, which has no great land mass outside the port or even inside the harbour area, when it wants to expand, within the port or harbour walls but under water, the land must be reclaimed with the express written approval of the Crown Estate Commissioners. They do not sign the letter or give their approval for nothing. From research that I have undertaken, I know that they make a request for a substantial contribution—that is a monopoly power—over land that is obtained without any competition. The land price often has no relationship to land prices that one may pay elsewhere.

I should like to hear whether the Minister believes that, if ports are to operate in a private sector manner and on full commercial terms, the Crown Estate Commissioners should be able to hold a privatised port to ransom. Will the Minister consider amendments to the Bill or a way of ensuring that the Crown Estate Commissioners cannot distort the price of, often, a small piece of land underneath the sea, which is vital if a port needs to expand or develop its operations?

Overall, the Bill is good for ports and good for the port of Dover and the people of Dover, but one or two matters must be examined in Committee, and we will need to be convinced on those points.

Mr. Leadbitter: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened with great interest to the submission of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and his concern about the 50 per cent. levy. He made a strong plea, did he not, for the levy to be examined again? I do not understand how the House is expected to receive such a submission when, on 15 March 1990, the hon. Gentleman is recorded as actually voting for the 50 per cent. when we considered the Tees and Hartlepool Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a debating point; it is certainly not a matter for the Chair.

7.26 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Several hon. Members, in particular Conservative Members, have expressed a willingness to serve on the Committee. That must come as a reassurance to the Whips, but several reservations have been expressed. If hon. Member's votes follow their voices, it will lead to some constructive Committee debate.

I share the concern of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) about the monopoly position of the Crown Estate Commissioners. According to harbour trustees and fish farmers in my constituency, the Crown Estate Commissioners exact considerable sums in respect of operations on their land. There is precious little evidence of what they put into it in return. If the hon. Gentleman tables amendments in Committee relating to the Crown Estate Commissioners, hon. Members will have a useful dialogue on that point.

My hon. Friends and I do not have any objection to the enabling parts of the Bill. We realise that the bulk of the

United Kingdom's trade—about 92 per cent. of our exports and imports—still uses our ports. Therefore, ports clearly play an important role in our economy. All my hon. Friends supported the Government in the ending of the national dock labour scheme. We believed that it would enable many of our ports to become more competitive. Competition between United Kingdom ports is a good spur to offering better facilities.

We are also aware that there is considerable competition between United Kingdom ports and those of our continental partners—I refer in particular to the south-east of England—and anything that adds to the ability of our ports to be more competitive and provide valuable services must be to our advantage. We should not forget the potential of ports on our west coast. With the opening of the channel tunnel, they could provide an entry into the European Community, particularly if the Government are prepared to support the north and Scotland and provide them with decent rail links.

Our general support for the enabling provisions of the Bill reflects the fact that those who opted for private legislation have become frustrated, and no doubt many other ports that wish to opt for privatisation have not chosen to do so because they have seen how private Bills tend to get bogged down.

This is probably not the place to discuss private legislation procedure. Suffice it to say that it is not satisfactory in all respects. This enabling Bill should ease the passage of ports which wish to be privatised.

I note that clause 8 provides for representations to be made to the Secretary of State once a scheme has been proposed to him by a port which wishes to enter the private sector. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what considerations will be relevant in determining whether the Secretary of State's consent should be given. One anxiety shared by many people is that, if predators, who are perhaps major port users, bid to such an extent that they gain effective control of a port, they will use that power to discriminate against other potential port users who may be their competitors. I shall be interested to know what considerations will be taken into account when representations are made to the Secretary of State.

As many hon. Members have already said, perhaps the most offensive and potentially damaging part of the Bill is that which provides for the compulsory privatisation of ports. Ports with a turnover of more than £5 million per annum may be forced to privatise. The Secretary of State said that several safeguards, as he called them, had already been written into the Bill.

First—a measure not entirely welcomed by Conservative Members—there would be no compulsory privatisation order within the first two years of the Bill becoming an Act. The £5 million threshold would be index-linked and there would be prior consultation. I accept that those safeguards are better than nothing, but if, after considering the matter and noting that the way to privatisation of a port had been simplified, a trust port decided that it did not wish to go down that road, the matter should be left there.

A port may reach that decision for good reasons, including not least the interests of the community served by the port. Ports should not come under pressure from central Government to privatise if they do not wish to do so. To have that cloud or threat hanging over them even in the first two years may inhibit a port from pursuing ventures that it wishes to take on.

The Secretary of State gave reasons why ports would be attracted to privatisation. He mentioned access to share capital for port development, development of surplus land, diversification of port business, clearer accountability and emphasis on profitability and the possibility of employee share ownership schemes.

My constituency interest in the Bill is that the Secretary of State could compel Lerwick harbour trust to privatise. In 1989, its turnover was £5·5 million, so it comes within the ambit of clause 9. The harbour trust was established in 1877 by the traders and merchants of Lerwick to oversee the maintenance and management of the port and harbour. In the past 20 years, Shetland has faced challenges and opportunities for development, and Lerwick Harbour Trust has responded.

Let us take the criteria set down by the Secretary of State. The trust has found funding by both investing its profits and raising money through the banks. It has shown resourcefulness and imagination in developing its land and diversifying its activities. If the House listens to the activities that the Lerwick harbour trustees have undertaken, it will see what they have achieved in addition to their statutory harbour duties and providing facilities for the oil and fishing industries and for ferries.

The trustees have managed to lease warehouse space to haulage firms and fish farmers. They have used some of their land for farming: 1,000 sheep are maintained on 1,400 acres. The trustees have invested in a 64-bedroom hotel in Lerwick, which was opened some six years ago by the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) when he was Secretary of State for Scotland. The trustees have provided important car parking facilities in the centre of the town. Many of my constituents grumble about the price charged, but everyone can accept that car parks in the centres of towns are a valuable facility.

The trustees have been instrumental in the past 12 months in developing a large herring and mackerel processing factory, which employs about 100 people. The facilities in the factory are state of the art and of the highest quality and standard. Those activities have been undertaken by a trust port. The trustees have shown that they can develop land and diversify their activities without recourse to privatisation. I accept that there are problems with employee participation—which, as some hon. Members will be aware, my party has long espoused. I hope that no tax or other restrictions will be placed on trust ports—if they wish to continue as trusts—developing profit-sharing schemes in which employees can participate.

The Secretary of State also mentioned accountability. The Lerwick harbour trustees are six Islands councillors, three harbour ratepayers and three representatives of local shipowners. Half the trustees are democratically elected representatives of the community, and subject to all the pressures of which we are well aware. Harbour ratepayers and local shipowners are accountable to their peers in the harbour and the local business world. There can be no question but that, if they made feeble decisions or failed to take commercially based decisions, they would soon come under a great deal of pressure.

We may be asked to give up that accountability for the accountability of the harbour board of directors to their shareholders, many of whom would be anonymous, with no knowledge of or interest in the business of the harbour.

[Mr. James Wallace]

We would be asked to give up a real accountability for an arrangement which notionally provides more accountability but in practice provides far less.

The Government's proposals recognise the need to seek profitability, but fail to recognise the need to take into account community interest. Compulsory privatisation of the ports would fail to provide for the community interest. The Secretary of State did not address the fact that many ports take into account the interest of the community, which is the way in for imported goods and the way out for exported goods. I have already mentioned the fish processing factory built in my constituency. The harbour trust was very much involved in setting it up. It brought together the expertise in the harbour—the fish processors and the fishermen of the community. It bonded that together and provided a valuable service and employment within the community.

If we had a company solely engaged in seeking profit, many activities which benefit the community as a whole would be lost. The trust is a valuable asset to a local community which is forced to capitalise on every possible asset. Its privatisation would be a great loss to that community. That is why we do not wish to see compulsion. I hope that the Government will take such considerations into account if it crossed their mind to implement the clause which would force unwilling harbour trustees down a road which they did not wish to travel. As several hon. Members have said, what is true of Lerwick harbour trust is also true of harbour trusts in many other parts of the country.

I note from the financial memorandum that the Government expect to raise between £30 million and £50 million from the levy in the first two years after the Bill becomes an Act. Will corporation tax be applied to any transfer of assets under the Bill which could be classed as a capital gain? That would undoubtedly lead to an increase in the 50 per cent. net proceeds of sale.

We have heard various reasons why the figure of 50 per cent. was chosen. The Secretary of State said the levy would be 50 per cent. of the proceeds of sale, whereas, under the Finance Act 1990, it could be up to 50 per cent. of market value. One of the consequences of the Finance Act distinction was that up to 3 per cent. of the total proceeds could be discounted if shares were sold to employees below value. Do I understand that there is no reference to that in this Bill and nothing in it to lessen the Government's commitment to encouraging employee participation, albeit that even 3 per cent. appeared rather limited?

Why this levy? In previous debates, the Secretary of State told us that there had already been pay-outs in terms of Government grants. In previous debates, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) challenged the Minister and asked what proportion of Government grant gave rise to a 50 per cent. levy. The Minister was unable to answer, and moved away from that ground. We are now told that it is to disallow unfair competition between different ports, and if there is a windfall profit, it must be taxed.

I wish I could hear what Tory Members would say if a Labour Government introduced a tax on profits at 50 per cent. to achieve social justice between competing parties. No doubt they would see that as rampaging socialism. Why should the Treasury have its snout in the trough just because some extra money is going round? The hon. Member for Dover seemed to accept that that was quite reasonable, but then said that the sum involved was inconsequential. It may be inconsequential to the Treasury, but it is consequential to the local communities from where it comes.

Why must the money go to the Treasury? Why can it not go to some local common good fund of the local authorities for investment in infrastructure related to the port? If we are to have successful port developments, they will undoubtedly require better services, including roads. Local authorities will come under pressure to provide those services. If they can get a nest egg or some windfall profit to help with that investment, surely it would be a better use of the funds than for the funds to go back into the coffers of the Treasury.

The final part of the Bill relates to lights and navigational aids. It is clear where this move has come from. Many hon. Members on both sides have opposed the ever-increasing pressure on increasing lights dues. No doubt an opportunity has been seized to reduce lights dues by removing some of the responsibility to harbour authorities in the hope that different harbour authorities will be competitive and will not try to pass on the full additional costs to the shippers, and that some saving will be made to the shipping companies.

Again we are faced with further duties being imposed on local authorities and harbour authorities without necessarily the revenue or the income with which they can carry these out, unless they pass the costs on with higher harbour charges. Will the Minister consider the possible unfair competition between different ports? A port such as Peterhead needs few navigational aids, but ports along a long length of river, such as the Forth or the Clyde, will inevitably need far more navigational aids. As a result, they may well be at a disadvantage. Those ports will have to pick up a far greater level of responsibility than those where there will be few navigational aids.

I am also aware that many of the navigational aids on the Yell Sound for Shetland and the Pentland Firth for Orkney which are within the respective councils' harbour areas are not necessarily navigational aids for shipping using the port and harbour facilities. They are general aids for through traffic. Clause 26(1)(b) may well cover that point, and navigational aids for through shipping may not become the responsibility of the local harbour authority. I suspect that that is covered, but confirmation would be welcomed. Otherwise, the harbour authorities could face a considerable bill as years go on, particularly in the years after the revenue from oil developments declines.

The enabling provisions of the Bill are welcome. They will facilitate the procedures for ports that wish to take advantage of this. The provisions which compel ports are not in the interests of the communities served by the ports, and for that reason my hon. Friends and I will vote against the Bill.

7.44 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I put your mind at rest, Madam Deputy Speaker, by informing you that the white confetti falling past your Chair is a late attempt by *Hansard* to give you a white Christmas?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have had confetti thrown at me in a former capacity as a bridesmaid, but never, alas, as a bride.

Mr. Field: I am sad to hear that, Madam Deputy Speaker, gazing, as I do, on your delightful form when you occupy that Chair.

I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is not in his place. Anybody who heard his speech could not help but be reminded of prehistory. There is talk on the Isle of Wight of building a dinosaur museum, and I was rather hoping that I might be able to nominate him for inclusion.

The hon. Gentleman made two specific points which should be answered. First, he said that the abolition of the dock labour scheme was an attack on workers' rights, and that it led to the depression of their wages. The House will recall that I mentioned the dock workers in Southampton who have said publicly that they are happy with the abolition and that they have gained considerably financially.

It is on the record of the House that the Transport and General Workers Union did not oppose the privatisation of the trust ports. I am delighted to see the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) in his place because, during debates on the Finance Bill, he talked about this 50 per cent. levy. He also played a part in piloting the Clyde Port Authority Bill through the House. I think I am right in saying—I am sure that he will put me right if I am wrong—that the Scottish TGWU did not object to the Bill, nor did the local authority, which is Labour-controlled. Remarkably, that great den of prehistory, the Labour party, objected to it. That shows how adrift it is in continuing to speak against this legislation.

Secondly, when the hon. Gentleman attacked my dear friend Nicholas Finney, it enabled me to conclude that he was two sandwiches short of a picnic. Mr. Finney has been a marvellous advocate of the British ports industry. He has done much to further its competitiveness. If his hand is behind the Bill, it will definitely be better as a result.

The hon. Gentleman answered a query that I had. The other day the, Waterfront Partnership conference to discuss the British ports industry was attended by the French. The French Government are taking a serious interest in what is happening in this country because they are concerned about their dock labour scheme and the rundown and dilapidation of their docks. They are looking to the example set by Great Britain and the Conservative Government in this legislation which is beginning to transform our entire ports industry. I hope that the Waterfront Partnership will advise the French Government when they come to privatise their ports industry. I should point out that France has a socialist Government. That shows, yet again, what a remarkable pace-setting piece of legislation this is.

The delegates at the conference were not confined to France. They came from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Estonia, Russia, Australia, Finland and Sweden—all to hear what marvellous work we are doing. I had thought that they all came to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State give a most excellent speech in the remarkable manner with which he delivered an extraordinary tour de force to the General Council of British Shipping at its centenary dinner. That certainly earned him the admiration of all his Conservative colleagues there. Thanks to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East we now know that none of that was true. Apparently everyone came to see the "infamous" Nicholas Finney.

I should declare an interest in the Bill. I am a member of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen. It took two Acts of Parliament to subdue that company—it ignored the first—because it was so unruly. That company is based on the Thames.

Tonight is a remarkable opportunity for a humble Back Bencher who had a part in drafting the Bill. In the Finance Bill Committee, I suggested to the Treasury that there should be a clawback on property redevelopment within 10 years of privatisation of the ports. That is the normal condition in commercial transactions. The device is often used if the land sold has property redevelopment potential. If such an arrangement had been used in the past, it would have saved the Government from a number of difficulties such as those connected with the Royal Ordnance sale and Rover. I suggested that arrangement because I believed that the 50 per cent. levy that the Treasury was seeking on the equity of the trust ports on privatisation arose from its concern about cashing in on the property assets.

At the time I did not realise that we would shortly have a Scottish Secretary of State for Transport—the Scots have a well-known interest in all finance. The Bill contains two 50 per cent. clawbacks—one for the property development potential and one which was sought by the Treasury. I agree with hon. Friends who say that we do not expect the Government to have their cake and eat it. I am anxious that the Treasury should continue to push for the clause that gives it a 50 per cent. share of the equity, or the proceeds, on privatisation.

I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) at the amount of money demanded by the Crown Estate Commissioners. The solution is available to all hon. Members who share that concern—they can apply for membership of the House of Commons yacht club, which is an all-party organisation. I am the secretary of that club, and this Wednesday we are having a meeting to discuss the concern felt among harbour authorities about the demands placed upon them by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East spoke of the restraints on the owners of trust ports. He was concerned that those owners would be unshackled as a result of the Bill. The best equivalent example that I can cite to the hon. Gentleman which should answer his concern is the Building Societies Act 1986. Before that Act building societies were required to perform in a particular way. They could invest only in gilt-edged securities and they had to keep a certain level of reserves in liquid assets. After that Act, however, a tremendous number of assets were freed up. Building societies now offer cash machines, cash cards and a network of facilities never available before. The trust ports will experience similar freedom.

The Bill will enable the trust ports to move from the treacle of trust ownership to the free-capital market. It will ensure that those ports' assets are made to work harder and that existing and future investments will have to be justified. The trust ports handle about half British overseas trade. In 1989 they imported and exported 480 million tonnes of goods worth £162 billion. Each trust port has its own Act of Parliament and is run by a stultifying mixture of executive officers and Government appointees which stems from the old tradition of public involvement in port

[Mr. Field]

facilities. The Government began to dismantle such involvement with the privatisation of the British Rail Sealink harbours and Associated British Ports and, subsequently, the abolition of the dock labour scheme. Those changes have contributed to a renaissance in our port industry.

The success of the Government's policy can best be demonstrated by the fact that, before the abolition of the dock labour scheme, Associated British Ports employed 1,700 dockers. Today it employs just 30, while it has seen a 10 per cent. increase in traffic.

As the House knows, I chaired the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. I asked the Library to compare the tonnage and traffic performance of Associated British Ports post-privatisation with that of the trust ports. In every case, Associated British Ports had out-performed the trust ports since privatisation. That is yet another reason for the Bill.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) spoke about buoyage and suggested that he knew where the provisions relating to that had originated. I can tell the House exactly the origin of those proposals—I suggested them to the Department of Transport and Nicholas Finney. I have pursued that cause for many years.

If we had implemented such a measure when we privatised Associated British Ports considerable benefit would have accrued to the taxpayer. In the Solent, for example, we would have pushed out the harbour limits from the Needles to Nab tower. If we had had such foresight that change would have removed the cost of buoyage from the taxpayer or from Trinity House. The cost of that buoyage and the light dues would have been transferred to the owners of Associated British Ports. However, Trinity House is still responsible for the buoyage. It is also worth noting that, remarkably, in the midst of the Gulf conflict, the Admiralty still lays some of the buoys in the Solent. One may ask why on earth the Admiralty is involved in such action in 1991. The buoys in the Solent are there to aid navigation, but they are principally used as yacht racing marks.

Trinity House has responsibility for buoyage and it must deal with the anomaly posed by the Port of London authority—perhaps the Minister is aware of similar anomalies in the Northern Lighthouse Board. The PLA has had its navigation marks in the Thames, free of charge, but at a cost to the rest of us, since it was granted a charter from Henry VIII. It is iniquitous that the rest of us should pay for that buoyage and the light dues when they are provided free for the PLA on the Thames, despite the fact that the PLA is an asset-rich organisation. I am delighted that that matter has been addressed in the Bill.

There is one singular omission from the Bill—it makes no mention of the port of Sharpness in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman). I have my hon. Friend's permission to mention his constituency interest tonight.

I have a particular interest in the port of Sharpness because it is owned by the British Waterways Board. Such ownership is an anomaly. I take that interest because someone regularly sends me "Inland Water Transport News" which is published each month. That someone has decided that, one day, the Solent will be made into a canal. One day Sharpness may want to be privatised, and it may get into the £5 million bracket. We should not allow the Bill to proceed without clearing up the anomaly of Sharpness, the only port owned by the British Waterways Board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud would be here tonight were he not Parliamentary Private Secretary to one of our ministerial colleagues at the Ministry of Defence. Even now, my hon. Friend is playing an active part, as we would wish, in assisting matters relating to the Gulf war.

The Bill is silent about pilotage exemption certificates. The Minister will know that with the help of the General Council of British Shipping I took on the issue of the exploitation by Portsmouth harbour, a municipal port, of such certificates. The legislation never intended them to be revenue-producing. The Port of London authority is also abusing the legislation. When a ship master has completed his six voyages which allow him to reapply for a pilotage exemption certificate, and his seventh voyage takes him a mere 100 yards further upriver than his previous six voyages, he will not be allowed to guide the ship upriver without employing a pilot. That is clearly contrary to the legislation, which was intended to liberalise. Some port authorities are using the legislation to raise revenue, although it was intended to free the movement of ships in our ports and rivers and allow them not to employ pilots if they regularly call at certain ports.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Conservative Members seem to disregard the fact that pilotage is a safeguard for ships, which require the expertise of pilots with local knowledge. Why are Conservative Members always trying to remove these safety standards? We have them in every industry and they contribute to the safety of those who work there; and they are in the general interests of the ports.

Mr. Field: Because the people of the Isle of Wight have been going back and forth to Portsmouth harbour since time immemorial. Portsmouth never charged for pilotage for the docking of ferries from the Isle of Wight until the introduction of this legislation. Portsmouth harbour authorities even tried to charge for the supply of a pilotage exemption certificate for the Gosport ferry. Does the hon. Gentleman really suggest that the Mersey ferry should be charged every time it crosses the Mersey? Of course it should not, and that is the sort of nonsense that I am talking about.

To return to navigation lights, I hope that officials in the Department will carefully examine any schemes that emerge to ensure that nearby headlands are included and can be included under the legislation in locations where they are not the main points of navigation. I refer, for instance, to St. Catherine's, Start point and Portland bill. In that way we shall push out the harbour limits and get as much as possible out of control and regular maintenance by our light authorities. In that way, we can effectively reduce light dues and make our ports more competitive.

The Government should take another look at the thorny issue of the 50 per cent. clawback. It is proper that the Government should safeguard themselves by means of the clawback on land development, but it is wrong of them to say that they do not own the trust ports and have no interest in them—so they must be the subject of private Bills—and then to say that they own 50 per cent. of them

and want some money for the taxpayers' purse. In this respect I do not want to align myself too much with my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), whose predecessor deprived the Isle of Wight of a famous resident by signing his death warrant and sending King Charles up to London to be executed.

Given the excellent work that Scottish Ministers have done to ensure that CalMac is, as far as possible, a profitable company, it is extraordinary, now that we have a well-known Scotsman as Secretary of State for Transport, that the Department of Transport still subsidises the Woolwich ferry and leaves it free of charge. That should not continue; it is time the Woolwich ferry was privatised.

8.4 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) spoke at length about the situation at Aberdeen harbour, and I should like to develop some of his points. He made it clear that the harbour is efficient and profitable. In the last reported financial year, its turnover was just over £10 million, and profit after tax was in excesss of £2 million. In the past 10 years, £27 million has been invested in refurbishing the harbour, which has been virtually rebuilt, and all the money came from the board's own resources.

The harbour is an efficient operation, serving the needs of local communities not only in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North but in the whole of north-east Scotland, including the constituency of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). The harbour is a vital part of the community's infrastructure.

The views of the harbour board are therefore relevant to this debate. We have heard a great deal from Conservative Ministers about the need for an enterprise culture and to open up harbours and ports to market forces. Such forces already apply in Aberdeen, but the board, which mainly comprises representatives of the business community and users of the port, has made a strong plea to the Government and to me that it be allowed to remain as a trust.

I have received a letter from the chief executive of the harbour board; it is strong stuff, and it says more than I can about the position of the harbour and how important it is that it should retain the flexibility with which its present status provides it. The letter is dated 24 January 1991 and signed by R. B. Braithwaite, general manager of Aberdeen harbour and chief executive of the board:

"My board have carefully considered the subject of privatisation and concluded that there are no benefits to be gained for Aberdeen harbour and there are significant dangers for some port users. Taking the points in the press release:"—

a press release from the Department of Transport dated 17 January 1991, in which the Secretary of State announced the publication of this Bill—

"'enhance the prospects of port development by giving them access to share capital.' We have, for a number of years, funded all port development from our own revenue. Some £27 million has been spent in the last decade on port maintenance and development. We envisage our future positive cash flow, together with our strong cash reserves and present borrowing powers, quite adequate to fund planned future development (currently estimated, as indicated in the Chairman's statement to the 1989 Annual Accounts at £37 million over the next 10 years). We have, therefore, no need of share capital."

The next purpose raised by the Secretary of State in the press release was

"'to stimulate the development of surplus land. Most trust ports are restricted to development for port purposes.' As you will be aware, we have no surplus land. All our land is of necessity heavily utilised in port operations to handle our increasing traffic levels."

The third purpose is to

"'enable port undertakings to diversify their businesses.' We at present have powers within our constitution to diversify into port related businesses. The Board, in running such an active regional port, has no wish or need to diversify into businesses not related to the port. Should we, however, wish to do so in the future we could promote a Harbour Revision Order to give us greater powers (as has been obtained by other ports such as Blyth)."

The Secretary of State's next purpose is

"to bring about clearer accountability and greater emphasis on profitability."

The general manager's letter continues:

"As was stated in my Chairman's letter to Lord Brabazon, the Board is accountable both in law and through its membership. The purpose of the port is primarily to serve all port users, and, therefore the commerce, industry and people of our region. It was for this purpose that the trust status, with its legal accountability, was created, and it is every bit as relevant today in a strong regional port such as Aberdeen. In addition, Aberdeen operates in a competitive market environment and has to respond to customers' requirements. In this respect, we are accountable to our customers in the same way as a private company. An accountability that has more real meaning in the operation of a business than accountability to shareholders. The fallacy of the shareholder accountability argument has often been demonstrated, for example, by the recent Guinness and Ferranti situations.

With regard to profit, we do place emphasis on running the harbour on a businesslike"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall be grateful if the hon. Member will paraphrase from the letter, rather than quote from it at length.

Mr. Doran: With respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am drawing to the end of the letter, and I did emphasise how important I thought it was to put it fully on the record. It makes its points very emphatically, and I would like them entered into the record rather than attempt to paraphrase them in my own words.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member is reaching the end of the letter. In general, the House is not very tolerant of long quotes, and right hon. and hon. Members are expected to paraphrase, and not weary the House in this way. The hon. Gentleman may think that it is important to quote extensively from the letter, which I am sure is relevant, although it does not improve the quality of debate. I trust that he will soon reach its conclusion.

Mr. Doran: I will, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I may add that it will make for a shorter speech from me.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is very welcome news.

Mr. Doran: The letter continues:

"With regard to profit, we do place emphasis on running the harbour on a businesslike and commercial basis. We have built one of the most modern and efficient ports of our size in Europe which is also profitable. You will see from our 1989 accounts that we made a profit after tax of over £2 million on our £10 million turnover, and these figures will be exceeded for 1990."

The general manager adds that the port gives high priority to the service provided to its users—a much higher priority

[Mr. Doran]

than profit, whereas a private company would place much greater emphasis on that aspect. The harbour's substantial profits are all ploughed back into the port.

The board's decision to reject the privatisation proposal was unanimous, despite the fact that its membership comprises mainly local business people and port users. Therefore, the general manager's letter accurately reflects the board's own view.

Aberdeen port sees itself as responsive to local needs. Over the past 10 years, it has needed to react dramatically to the increase in harbour use brought about by the growth in the oil business and changing habits in the fishing industry. It has coped well, and it has no wish to privatise. I admit that the harbour may welcome the flexibility offered by the Bill, but the fear that it will be compelled to privatise is increased by Government statements.

The points made by the harbour's general manager in the letter from which I have just quoted were presented also in his letter to the Secretary of State in November. He received a reply from Lord Brabazon, Minister for Aviation and Shipping, dated 22 November 1990. The general manager made it clear that there was no wish for privatisation, set out the arguments against it, and asked the Government to justify their use of the reserve power. Lord Brabazon replied:

"It would therefore be a matter of concern if the number of ports coming forward quickly with privatisation schemes was very small and if no further schemes seemed to be in prospect."

The Government are already anticipating failure, as Lord Brabazon's letter makes clear.

Even though I object to the philosophy behind privatisation, I accept that the Government may want to provide extra flexibility in the form of another option, but my harbour authority and I find repugnant the element of compulsion. Lord Brabazon's reaction was amplified in a speech made on 23 January by the Secretary of State, when he addressed the Waterfront Partnership conference:

"The very differing circumstances of those ports even above the threshold are recognised. A decision to use the reserve power will only be taken after full consideration with any individual port; and the commitment to consult is written into the Bill."

The Secretary of State repeated that assurance today, and made much of the requirement to consult that is written into the Bill.

Like many other hon. Members, I am currently in the midst of a consultation process on whether my local hospital should apply for trust status under the new health service legislation. The hospital's unit manager has already made it clear every time that he has been asked to confirm his position that, whatever may be the outcome of the consultations, he is determined to make an application for trust status anyway. The harbour board is very aware of the attitude that is being adopted in relation to that process of consultation, which it believes is encouraged by the Scottish Office. Therefore, there is no great expectation that the process of consultation promised by the Bill will be any fairer.

That suspicion is given credence by remarks made by the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport at a press conference on 17 January when, referring to the reserve power, he said:

"The Government would be disappointed if only one or two ports came forward quickly to privatise. The Government would used the reserve powers for the 14 trust ports"—

including Aberdeen—

"unless there were good reasons for not doing so."

No suggestion there of consultation, or of anything other than compulsion.

Protection needs to be provided for harbours such as Aberdeen, which has proved successful, has met changing needs, and is properly serving its local community. When the Secretary of State was pressed today on public interest, he seemed to accord it a much lower priority—as does the Bill. When I pressed him on his reference to the anomaly of trust status, he responded with a comment about modern business needs. The Secretary of State ignores the public responsibilities that are placed on trusts, and which will not easily be passed into private hands.

Historically, our harbours and ports were community facilities. In Scotland, they were usually controlled by local authorities or by direct grant to commissioners under the Crown. Later, they were controlled by private orders that clearly set out the duties and responsibilities of the Commissioners, trusts or local authorities responsible for them. Those bodies were charged with protecting the public interest, regulating the harbours, and developing their facilities to the benefit of the local community. Aberdeen has done all three very well.

After close scrutiny of the Bill, the Aberdeen harbour board is concerned about the extent of public protection that will remain under privatisation. I confess to not having studied the Bill line by line, but my brief examination of it gives rise to several concerns. Clause 2(2), which concerns the transfer of undertakings, states:

"(b) all functions conferred or imposed on the authority by any statutory provision of local application;

are transferred to . . . the successor company."

There is no mention there of whether the new companies' first priority will be to serve the interests of the public or its shareholders. Neither is that aspect covered by the supplementary provisions with respect to tranfers that are specified in schedule 1. The Government should clarify what priority is to be given to public interests.

Earlier, mention was made of pilotage. In Aberdeen, harbour pilotage is compulsory for safety reasons. However, it is expensive, and may be seen as a disincentive to possible customers.

There are some unprofitable operations in Aberdeen harbour. We have one of the largest fish markets in Britain and it is vital to the local community. In my constituency, about 3,500 jobs depend upon the import and sale of fish at the harbour. If a profit-orientated company came along and decided that the market was no longer profitable and either increased charges, which because of the profit margins in the industry at the moment might put a lot of people out of business, or scared fishing boats away to other ports—there has been a lot of that recently, as there is a lot of competition in that area of the industry—those 3,500 jobs would be put at risk.

What obligations will be imposed upon the private company so that that wider issue would be considered in Aberdeen? The fishing industry is crucial for the local community, and no less important than all the other activities of the harbour, and it must be preserved; but it does not make a profit. Where will that come in the scale of priorities?

I do not see anything in the Bill which provides for the insolvency of any of the companies. I know that Aberdeen harbour has gone through hard times and that other harbours suffer from time to time. What will happen, and

who will protect the public interest? If a company goes bust, where are the reserve powers? There is nothing in the Bill to deal with that. Will the Secretary of State keep responsibility to operate the harbour to ensure that it operates, or impose some other body which can operate it? Will he recreate the trust? In that situation, what would his reserve powers be? While dealing with the principle of the Bill, the Minister needs to explain those issues. Genuine concerns exist on this side of the House and they have been well expressed by all Opposition Members who have spoken.

I am speaking on behalf of local interests, but I know that my concerns can be applied to virtually every harbour in the country, and I know that Aberdeen harbour is not unique in its opposition to reserve powers. Of the 14 harbours which may be targeted and which come within the terms of the Bill, as I understand it at least nine oppose the measure. These are serious issues, which demand a response from the Government.

8.21 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I fully support the Bill. It seems to me to be the logical next step, following on from the abolition of the dock labour scheme, which I was involved in when I was at the Department of Employment. The scenarios put forward in opposition to the scheme at that time proved wholly ill founded, and I have no doubt that some of the fears and the comments that we have heard tonight about what will happen in the port industry if this measure goes ahead will prove equally ill founded.

I shall bear in mind your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, about time and the fact that other hon. Members will wish to speak. Therefore, I intend to confine my remarks to certain matters of detail which concern me.

The explanatory notes on the Bill state that clause 16

"makes provision for a levy on gains accruing to a successor company as a result of certain disposals of any land or interest in land that is transferred . . . The levy is charged on disposals made within a period of 10 years after the date of transfer and is charged at the rate (subject to change by order) of 50 per cent. of the amount of the gain."

The details of the Bill provide for clawback to be levied on "deemed disposals" where the value has been enhanced —for example, where planning permission has been granted for change of use, but where no cash proceeds have changed hands. Obviously, the Government hope that trust ports will come forward with privatisation schemes without delay, but I have no doubt that, if they want that to happen, the Government will have to accept some narrowing of the incidence of clawback in at least four basic respects.

First, clawback should apply only on cash disposals of land which yield a gain. Secondly, clawback should be limited to genuine windfalls. Thirdly, the base cost for clawback must be clarified. Finally, the time limit for the application of the clawback should be set at five years, at the most, and certainly not at 10 years, which is provided for in the Bill.

Let me clarify those points. Clawback cannot be made to apply to gains arising on "deemed disposals" without risking serious policy reverses, and especially by frustrating economic regeneration. Worse still, if there are distressed sales in a bad market simply to raise money to pay the levy, it could cripple the successor company. The irony is that we have been down that path before.

Let us think back to Labour's development land tax experiment in the 1970s, which confirmed the total impossibility of collecting a betterment levy when no cash had been realised. That point was made on Third Reading of the Development Land Tax Bill in 1976. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart), who subsequently had a distinguished career in Government, especially in the Treasury, pointed out in that debate to our hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury).

"My hon. Friend . . . referred to the structure of this tax and the fact that, because of the deemed disposal, it would fall to be paid, in many cases, before the funds were received either, in the case of a capital investment, before the value was realised or, in the case of a trading operation before the profits accrued."

He concluded, and I commend these words to my hon. Friend the Minister who will be winding up the debate:

"We believe that this is a fundamental weakness in the tax itself."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 215.]

My right hon. Friend was right on that occasion, and the same is true now. That analogy is on all fours with the situation that we are now considering. It seems to me that it would be wholly wrong to try to revive today the concept of "deemed disposals". That should have no part whatsoever in the policies being advocated by the Government side of the House.

On windfall profits, it seems to me absolutely imperative to restrict clawback to cash disposals which result from windfall profits obtained by changes in planning use, which were not contemplated—that is the key point—at the time of the sale of the successor company. Exemptions should be permitted on all trading operations within the successor companies.

If one obtains a profit through normal trading activity —not involving a disposal of land to realise cash—it should not be regarded as a suitable case for clawback. The base cost for calculating clawback should be the full market value of the land in question at the date of privatisation.

I fully accept—on this at least, I am completely ad idem with my hon. Friend the Minister—that the Government have to act in the interests of the taxpayers, and that, if at all possible, the taxpayers should realise that the Government are acting in their interests. However, if we are to make any sense of this at all, we have to start with a recognition that, by proposing competitive tendering as the basis for selling a trust port, the Government are already ensuring that the price paid for a port reflects the full market value of its assets. At the moment, I do not see that reflected in the Bill. The potential development value of a port's surplus land will be taken into account by bidders, whether or not planning permission has been applied for.

The pathfinder prospectus for electricity privatisation envisaged original cost as the base value of the calculation of clawback in certain cases of land disposal or betterment. It follows from what I have said that that base cannot be applicable in the case of trust ports by virtue of the interposition of the levy on proceeds which—although I would not expect my hon. and right hon. Friends to concede it—is a particularly cunning device of Government, because in many cases it will produce a 100 per cent. levy, rather than a 50 per cent. levy.

If time permitted, I could show how that would come to pass. Suffice it to say for the purpose of my argument this evening that the only reasonable basis for trust ports is full market value on privatisation day. The reason for

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

that is that it is only by choosing that point that the Government will avoid what is effectively piling tax upon tax.

Let me say in passing, although it is an extremely important point, that a great deal of care will have to be taken to ensure that there is no overlap between clawback tax and capital gains tax. This is an argument which should appeal to my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench, because using the basis of original cost will only serve to build large amounts of potential tax liability into the original flotation. That will have a correspondingly depressing effect on the bids submitted by potential buyers and hence on the point of sale proceeds.

I accept the Government's obvious concern—concern which has been expressed in differing ways by hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening—that it is conceivable that a port might attract the attention of an asset stripper, or someone who does not intend to carry on business there in the traditional way of the port. It seems to me, however, that there is a limit to how far the Bill can go to protect against that possibility without doing serious damage to its own intentions. Let me put it simply: all potential clawback devalues the port concerned at the point of privatisation, with all the attendant effects on the Government's possible proceeds.

Obviously I do not wish to suggest that clawback has no place in such arrangements. Surely, however, it can play a part only in the event of a complete windfall: when a gain on land has accrued to a port in a way that no one could reasonably foresee at the time of privatisation, and —this is an important "and"—when that gain has been realised by sale. As I have said, the question of deemed disposals should have no place in our deliberations.

Finally, let me deal with the issue of the time scale. Even a five-year period for clawback will bear heavily on management and employee-buyout buyers, who will be obliged to exploit land potential quickly because of the high gearing that they will probably have incurred in mounting a bid in the first place. Clawback should be restricted to a maximum of five years from the date of privatisation; a 10-year post-privatisation period would certainly not be appropriate.

Mr. McLoughlin: Two years.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend says, "Two years," on the basis that politics may be the art of the possible; however well briefed he may be, I do not think that he will be able to argue about a five-year maximum when he winds up the debate, and I can imagine a case being made for two years. There are precedents for the approach that I recommend: I am thinking of, for instance, the Scottish Development Agency.

Those are all detailed points; had time allowed, I would have expanded on them. I do not, of course, expect detailed answers tonight, but they are all obvious points of concern to anyone with a knowledge of the ports industry. My right hon. and hon. Friends must have already reflected on them, at least in outline. Although I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to go into details on this occasion, I hope that I will hear something about the Government's provisional thinking, rather than another recitation of the time-honoured formula—recited by myself on occasion—that runs, "All these points are extremely interesting, and will be borne in mind and considered in due course." Mine are all obvious points, but they are none the worse for that. As I have said, I hope that my hon. Friend will at least share his provisional thinking with me.

I am, of course, aware that the detailed operation for clawback will have to be set out in a statutory instrument following the enactment of principal legislation. Let me emphasise, however, that my proposals cannot be seen as peripheral: they go to the heart of the Bill, and I feel that it is no exaggeration to say that, while the Bill could still be the success that it deserves to be if they are not adopted, if we get this wrong we will entirely defeat its purposes. It would be a grim irony if—because of a failure to pay attention to points that the Government must, to some extent, have considered already—we managed, in dealing with this excellent measure, to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

8.33 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am sorry that I could not be here earlier to hear the Secretary of State explain the Bill; I hope that he did not deal with all the points that I intend to make.

I oppose the Bill because it is so narrow. There is much more to a port than the commercial interest—the profit-and-loss account. The Clyde port authority, for instance, is not concerned merely with the city of Glasgow; its responsibility extends down into Ayrshire and across to the island of Arran, and takes in all the surrounding sea lochs, too. Obviously, there will be conflicts between commercial, leisure and land interests.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): We in Wales have similar concerns about the commercial aspects of privatisation. Often, the sort of action that is favoured by Conservative Members is against the interests of the local community, whose interest in the running of the ports should come first.

Mr. Worthington: That should certainly be taken into account. I do not want to return to the issues raised during the debates on the Clyde Port Authority Bill, but, for example, the port of Glasgow is a highly artificial creation: it exists only because of the persistent dredging in the area. A small private company might decide that, in commercial terms, it was not worth continuing to dredge the port: if its interest was confined to the land on the banks, it would be happy to throw away the river that means so much to local people.

Major philosophical issues lie behind the Bill; I wish, however, to dwell on one or two points. This will earn me no favours from the Opposition Front Bench, but I consider this Bill superior in many respects to private Bills such as the Clyde Port Authority Bill and the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. Why should the safeguards in this Bill be denied to the Clyde? The Government seem to have listened to Opposition criticism of the Clyde and Tees and Hartlepool authorities, and written safeguards into this Bill as a result; they are not in those private Bills, however.

Under clause 5, the disposal will be supervised by the Government. I do not like the present Government, but I feel that, if what I regard as a public asset belonging to the community is to be disposed of, it should be done in a way that includes some parliamentary safeguard. The present

members of the Clyde port authority, who established the way in which the authority was to be privatised, were set up as the key figures in the launching of the successor company. Clearly, such an arrangement contains the potential for a considerable conflict of interests.

An obvious example is the valuation of assets. If I am the seller of the assets, it should be in my interest to obtain the maximum possible price; if I am the buyer, it is in my interest to pay the lowest possible price. If, however, I am both buyer and seller—as is happening with Clyde port authority—it will lead to an ambiguity of interests that should not arise in any Bill that is dealt with in the House of Commons. I am glad, therefore, that this Bill provides for a supervisory role for the Minister—who, in the case of a Scottish Bill, would be the Secretary of State for Scotland. That is another improvement: for the first time, responsibility for a Scottish port will be transferred from the rather distant care of the Department of Transport to the Scottish Office. If I am wrong, I am sure that the Minister will deal with the point.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State for Transport will decide these matters. If it should be a fisheries question, it will be decided by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful for that clarification. My point, however, is that a Minister of the Crown can examine the structure of a company set up by a port authority and say that it is or is not in order. No safeguard whatsoever is provided in the Clyde Port Authority Bill. The port authority members will decide who obtains the shares. They will decide how the company is to be privatised. It is completely wrong that no safeguard should be included in the Clyde Port Authority Bill.

As for clause 8, the schemes set up by the relevant port authority will lead to the submission of copies of the memorandum and articles of the company. The safeguards that are provided in this Bill are not to be found in the Clyde Port Authority Bill or in the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. The people who were appointed by the Department of Transport and who happen now to be port authority members will set up a successor company in the way that they see fit.

Neither I nor any other hon. Member nor any member of the public will be able to bid for shares in the company. Only the present members of the port authority can buy shares in the privatised company. That is not good enough. There may be a dispute as to whether the port authority belongs to the nation, but what is not in dispute is that the port authority does not belong to the port authority members. They should not be able to set up a company, for whatever reason, as they see fit without control being exercised over them by the public and by Parliament.

I welcome clause 16, which refers to windfall profits. All hon. Members agree that people should be deterred by regulation from becoming members of the company if they have no commitment to the area or to the workers in that company. They should not be allowed to pick up a great deal of money simply because the assets were undervalued, thus leading to the market price greatly exceeding the previous valuation. I applaud the Government for introducing safeguards to prevent windfall profits from being made. Why is not a similar safeguard included in the Clyde Port Authority Bill? The Minister recognises that, when ports are privatised, certain rules should be followed. If such a safeguard is good for all the other ports—London, Aberdeen, Great Yarmouth and so on—it should be good for the Clyde, too. Safeguards should be written into the Bill to cover the way in which a company is set up, and a similar provision should be written into the Bill to cover windfall profits.

I hope that the Minister will say something about how the Clyde Port Authority Bill and this Bill will work in tandem. The Clyde Port Authority Bill is being considered in the other place. As the Government have such a large majority, it will eventually be passed. This Bill will be considered in this House and then in the other place and it, too, will eventually be passed. It is possible that this Bill will be passed first, but it is more likely that the Clyde Port Authority Bill will be passed first and will receive Royal Assent.

This Bill lays down how a port authority is to be privatised. It says:

> "'Relevant port authority' means any body which is a harbour authority, other than one within subsection (4) below."

It excludes any company having a share capital, a local authority, the British Waterways Board, Associated British Ports and the Port of London authority.

The Bill lays down the means by which a port authority should be privatised. At that time, the Clyde port authority may not have been privatised. It may not by then have become a company with a share capital. Does that mean that the Clyde Port Authority Bill has no validity because this subsequent Bill lays down that this is the way in which a port authority should be privatised?

8.46 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you will know that the largest trust port in the United Kingdom is in my constituency. I refer to the very fine port of Tilbury. I give a warm welcome to the Bill. Its objective is to free all trust ports in Great Britain, including Tilbury, from the constraints that trust port status places upon them.

Tilbury is the largest trust port in the country. Moreover, it is the finest port in the country. I am immensely proud to represent it and the many men and women who live in my constituency who work in it. Tilbury, with a turnover of £45 million a year, is trying to compete against Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp and Felixstowe, but it is having to do so with one hand tied behind its back. An organisation that is not truly commercial has to try to compete with commercial organisations. It is hampered by the constraints of its trust port status.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) rightly said during his comments—the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) called it a peroration and I am not sure whether that was a compliment or an insult—that the crux of the debate should be about what is best for the ports industry in this country. It should be about the best way to make sure that all our ports use their resources most effectively to make sure that they are as profitable and productive as possible and to increase employment in the ports. It comes down, therefore, to whether we think that the best status for a port is to be in the public sector—whether through the national Government or a local authority—or to be a trust port or a plc.

[Mr. Tim Janman]

If our ports are to be provided with a combination of maximum flexibility, through access to share and loan capital, and to have removed constraints that exist with trust port status, but are to maintain the initiative and ability to react quickly to the marketplace, which is not possible when anything is in public ownership, trust ports should be made plcs. That will be the most intelligent course and the best way forward for our ports industry. Then all our ports can plan to use their resources and to invest in the most forward-looking, flexible and intelligent way.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows from his visit to Tilbury about a week ago that not only the management but many of the employees are keen and enthusiastic about a management-employee buy-out. They fear being taken over by an unknown quantity. Although I do not necessarily agree that their fears are well founded, they exist and it would be dishonest of me to pretend that they do not. I should like a management-employee buy-out of Tilbury and every docker to have a stake in the ownership and future of the port. I should like Tilbury dock to be given to the dockers. That has been the essence of the populist-capitalist philosophy that the Government have pursued for 11 years. I very much hope that that will be the eventual outcome for the port of Tilbury and its employees.

If that occurs, it will enhance the already high motivation that has been apparent from docker up to chief executive since the abolition of the appalling dock labour scheme. It is important to say that Tilbury's main asset is its work force, whose structure, commitment and expertise have improved enormously since the abolition of the dock labour scheme. The management of the port has invested heavily in training and has made excellent industrial progress. As I said when I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, productivity records are continually being broken. Before the abolition of the dock labour scheme, I would not have read in a local newspaper of new productivity records being set in Tilbury. Every month or so, I see such welcome publicity in my local newspaper.

Tilbury is a major national trading asset. It will be enhanced if the objectives of the Bill, which I support and welcome, are met.

But—I now come to the "but"—as the Bill stands, will those objectives be met? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who made an excellent speech, that several unnecessary and spurious obstacles in the Bill will slow and hamper its objective of plc-ising, if I may create a new "ising" term, trust ports in the United Kingdom.

My first concern, as I hinted earlier, is why on earth there should be a two-year wait before the Secretary of State can use his reserve powers to force the reluctant management of some trust ports to remove themselves from their current moribund and static status into the exciting and challenging world of the marketplace, free from the constraints that they hide behind under trust port status. I agree that one cannot go from A to B overnight and that time must be available to work out how one will get from A to B, but one year would be a perfectly reasonable period for the management of a trust port that genuinely wished to move to the status of a plc to get from A to B. Two years is twice as long as is necessary.

My second worry is why the Bill limits the cut-off point at £5 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) agreed that the figure should be £1 million. In Committee, the Government should accept an amendment allowing an order-making power so that the figure can be reviewed with a view to reducing it to less than £1 million after the Bill has become law and in the light of experience. By reducing it to £1 million, another eight ports can be included immediately. I am pleased that, at the £5 million point, Belfast will have the opportunity of becoming a plc under separate legislation.

My third worry is about the consultation aspects of clause 8. Either we want to privatise these ports or we do not. I hope that the Government will consider exactly what consultation and representation from the locality mean. If that means consultation on how changing the port from a trust to a plc is achieved, I am in favour of that—I am in favour of as many ideas and perspectives on how that can be achieved and brought into play as possible—but I would not want the Secretary of State to be taken off on a lot of irrelevant tangents that are put forward to frustrate the Bill's objectives. I am happy for consultation to remain in the Bill if it is consultation about how. I hope that it will be limited to how, and not extended, as it seems to be, to whether, the change in status from trust port to plc status takes place.

My fourth concern about the Bill is the levy, about which we have heard much. I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Dover said. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, the 50 per cent. levy does not apply to the port of Tilbury. Fifty per cent. of the proceeds of the sale of the port of Tilbury will go to the Port of London authority, which will pay off debts that it owes to the Government, and I welcome that.

I am concerned that, for the other ports, this is simply the Treasury trying to get its sticky fingers on money that it should not have. The remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover were interesting. One would not want to reduce the levy if it would mean—theory points to this, but it will not necessarily be borne out in practice—that the sale price would be higher than it would be otherwise, thereby discouraging management-employee bids. As I said earlier, my hon. Friend the Minister will know that I am keen on preference being given to management-employee buy-outs.

Provided that lowering the levy does not contradict in practical terms or go against that objective, I would urge my hon. Friend the Minister to see whether the levy can be abolished or significantly reduced. As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge said, in reality the 50 per cent. levy on sale price could mean that a 100 per cent. levy is put on market value, which simply is not on.

My fifth concern about the Bill is the clawback procedure, which is quite startling. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, will he clarify the definition of "gain"? Whatever the percentage of the clawback, it should be applied only to the quantum gain in the value of the land vis-a-vis its original value when the port was first bought by the new company. When the competitive bid is made for the port, the value of all the land in the geographical area covered by it will be included

in the price that the successful bidder makes for the port. It would be double counting to have clawback on the total value of land that is sold.

It seems to me that one of the benefits of the legislation will be the release of surplus land at the larger ports, such as Tilbury—land which is currently being put to no use. Irrespective of how productive or efficient many of the larger ports are, and irrespective of how much more successfully they will be able to take on their competitors when they become plcs, the fact is that the industry has changed considerably since the second world war. With reducing numbers of people and the disappearance of outdated equipment, there is land that is genuinely surplus.

Of course, the Bill must contain provisions to discourage the sort of land speculation to which my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge referred. We do not want to see whole ports being bought up and, two years later, turned into housing estates. If that should happen, the asset of a port would be lost. On the other hand, we do not want the new owners of ports to be prevented from selling land that is genuinely surplus and could be used for another purpose—whether industry or, in the south-east, much-needed housing. The Bill, as it stands, runs the risk of resulting in a long and unnecessary delay in having land sold and then put to productive use.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a danger in having a time limit of 10 years? A new owner, five years after acquisition, might decide that some land was surplus and might decide to leave it for another five years in order to get full value. Would not that be a great disincentive to getting the land quickly into productive use?

Mr. Janman: It certainly would. My hon. Friend has simply re-emphasised a point that I may have laboured. Of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge has been tainted by service in the Government. He suggested that the clawback should apply after 10 years. I suggest that it should apply after two years, and that the level should be only 35 per cent.—a fairly good figure, as it is, I think, the current level of corporation tax—rather than 50 per cent.

If the stagnant land at many of our ports—land which will continue to be surplus after the passage of the Bill—is to be brought into productive use, we must get the balance right. We must protect our ports. We must ensure that they do not cease to be ports as a result of land speculation. At the same time, we must not put up a barrier to incentive for new companies to get rid of surplus land that is never going to be needed for port activity.

The Bill contains hurdles that serve the vested interests of those moribund managements that fear the freedoms and disciplines of the marketplace and the accountability to the shareholders that will come about once they become plcs. That is why I say that we must not have a £5 million limit. We must compel more of these ports to become plcs. We know that that will result in more effective use of these resources, from the point of view of both the port and the national interest. That is the whole reason behind the Bill. At present, while some of these moribund trust port managements fiddle, many of the ports remain under-utilised. Our objective must be to turn as many trust ports as possible into plcs as quickly as possible.

I support the Bill because, in my judgment, it will eventually benefit every member of the Tilbury work force. I want to see the port of Tilbury become the most successful, most dynamic and most diverse port in northern Europe. I am absolutely convinced that this legislation, for which I shall vote, will see that objective achieved.

9.4 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): As the Member for the constituency of Blyth Valley, I shall speak about the port of Blyth. It is a very old port. It was a submarine base during the war and was one of the largest exporters of coal during the 1930s, the 1940s and the 1950s. It is one of the 14 ports that have been mentioned, having a turnover of between £5·5 million and £6 million. That, of course, is unfortunate for the port itself. It has a work force of about 2,000, including those engaged in port-related occupations. The port authority has a vested interest in ensuring that what happens is in those people's interests. For the past 120 years, the port has received £200,000 in Government grants, which says a lot for the 50 per cent. rip-off in the Bill. Governments have given little to Blyth.

Last Friday evening, the local authority, the county authority, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson)—whose constituency borders the harbour—and I had a meeting with the harbour commission which runs Blyth port. We feared the Bill. The commission told us that it did not want the port privatised. Blyth is a fairly big port with many modern facilities. It has always looked forward, even when it lost the coal trade because of the closure of most of the mines in the area. It has a lot going for it. The harbour commissioners are not raging socialists. They are not like me, but I am the Member of Parliament for Blyth Valley and I take their advice. Some of the men and women on the commission have been running the port for a long time and have much more idea of how the port would run after privatisation than I have.

Who will buy and take over the port? Much has been said about that. I was on the Committee on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. When asked whether the port authority would buy into other ports if the Bill became law, the chief executive said that it would certainly buy other ports on the coast. The harbour commissioners are afraid that that could happen and that Tees and Hartlepool plc would be able to buy into Blyth.

Some people may say that Tees and Hartlepool plc would make a good job of Blyth. Blyth has two roll-on/roll-off facilities to deal with paper from Finland. The Tees and Hartlepool port authority is building a second roll-on/roll-off facility, so nothing would stop it closing the facility at Blyth and bringing the work to Tees or Hartlepool. The plc would take over Blyth and leave it desolate.

Blyth has always made a small profit, but if it does not get sufficient turnover, it will die. It has a bill of £2 million a year for dredging because the harbour contains a lot of silt. The harbour commission has looked for and bought land. It is all very well saying, "Sell the land to anyone who comes along," but what will happen if the land is sold to a company like McDonalds, which sells buns and beefburgers, but someone else comes along and says, "I

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

want to build my factory next to the river"? Does the authority say, "Sorry, we have just sold the land to McDonalds"? What will happen to the land then?

One has to plan harbours. Ports authorities have to keep land in reserve in case an industrialist knocks on their door and says, "I want a bit of land to build a factory for my exports or imports." Harbour planning does not involve selling land to whoever comes along and giving it to the highest bidder. Ports such as Blyth, which are on the fringes, are there waiting to be sold off and asset-stripped. That, at any rate, was the fear expressed to us on Friday night by the harbour commissioners—men who have spent their lives dealing with the harbour and who operate according to its traditions.

If that happened, Blyth would stand to lose 2,000 jobs, and that would be a great loss. Not many years ago, just after the miners' strike, the pit went through the review procedures and was closed, with the loss of more than 1,000 jobs. The Government gave us nothing to replace those jobs. With the exception of a few new jobs at factories in the industrial complex at Camlington, those jobs have never come back to Blyth. I hope that there will be no asset-stripping but, if there is, more jobs could be lost to the Blyth area.

The harbour commissioners told my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck and me that they feared compulsory privatisation because the port's turnover is at the £5 million mark. In respect of such ports, the Secretary of State should examine the consequences of privatisation and consider what has been achieved. If he did that with Blyth, he would not bother to privatise because things are going along very nicely, thank you.

9.10 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): My constituency port—Ipswich—has prospered during the past decade. It has taken advantage of its geographical position and its generally good industrial relations to expand and develop. It may surprise hon. Members to learn that Ipswich is now the sixth largest container port in the country—behind only Felixstowe, London, Southampton, Hull and Liverpool. That excellent performance is a tribute to the management of the port of Ipswich and to all who work in it.

Ipswich has done well as a trust port, but I believe that, with proper safeguards, privatisation could bring it further benefits. I emphasise the need for proper safeguards, because there are hazards. I have no quarrel with the kind of takeover which has as its aim the strengthening and development of a port. That kind of takeover can clearly bring economic benefits, but there are two kinds of takeover which we definitely need to deter. The first is a takeover of the asset-stripping variety, in which a predator comes along concerned only with property values and with no interest in the port as such. Such a predator can all too easily damage and even kill off a perfectly viable port. The danger is particularly great in the south-east of England. We all know to what unrealistic levels property values rose two or three years ago. With property values now so depressed, that danger has temporarily disappeared, but the risks will reappear as soon as the property market recovers.

I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave some indication that he was aware of those risks. In his opening speech, he rightly recognised that different circumstances affect different ports and that some are much more at risk of an asset-stripping takeover than others. He should take account of that in exercising his powers under the Bill.

The levy or clawback provided under clause 16 will act as a deterrent to asset-stripping. In so far as it is a deterrent, I welcome it. However, it is important to remember that the clawback provision could hamstring a privatised port which plans to expand and modernise its facilities and wishes to sell the assets that are surplus to its requirements in order to finance that expansion and modernisation. We must not allow such plans for expansion to be held back. Clause 16 gives the Secretary of State considerable discretion over how he operates the clawback. I hope that he operates it to discourage asset-strippers, but not so as to hobble ports that want to sell assets to raise money to invest in improvements.

The second kind of takeover that must be guarded against is that made with the intention of eliminating a competitor port. Abolition of the dock labour scheme has greatly increased competition between ports. Quite a few ports in the new competitive climate might be only too glad to eliminate competition by means of a takeover. The principal safeguard in the event of that sort of takeover bid would be the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. However, when we consider the Bill in Committee, the threat posed by that sort of takeover should be very much in our minds.

I was glad to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State say that he was considering how best to encourage management-employee buy-outs, and that he had it in mind to provide a degree of preference for those buy-outs. There is a great deal of interest in a management-employee buy-out among those who work in the docks in my constituency. In deciding what degree of preference to accord such a buy-out, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will remember that the enthusiasm and commitment which would be generated by a management-employee buy-out would immensely improve efficiency and flexibility. That would bring benefits not just to the managers and employees, but to shippers, consumers and the economy as a whole. There is a great deal to be said for management-employee buy-outs.

9.17 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I have been very interested in this debate and in particular in the speeches of Conservative Members, because those Conservative Members who represent constituencies with ports are showing more caution about the Bill than are those who do not represent ports. There is good reason for that.

Many trust ports share my belief that there is no justification for the Bill. The port transport industry has recently undergone a further upheaval with the abolition of the national dock labour scheme. People who praise the legislation which abolished the scheme should bear it in mind that at that time the Secretary of State for Transport and his Ministers promised that the abolition of the scheme would enhance the ports because land would

become available to developers which at the time was not available as a result of the strictures placed on it by the national dock labour scheme.

There is no evidence that such enhancement has occurred in the port of Liverpool. It was also claimed that the abolition of the dock labour scheme would result in the creation of 50,000 jobs in and around the ports industry. Will the Minister tell us what has happened to those jobs or when that objective will be realised? It is clear that that prophecy has not been fulfilled. It was a fraud on the part of those who made that speculation.

The ports of Britain are still a key sector of British industry. Therefore, the House should pause to think what would happen in circumstances in which our ports went completely outside the accountability that now exists. The port transport industry, shipping and trade, have been at the heart of Britain's economy for centuries. I accept that many changes have taken place in the pattern of world trade. In particular, the development of the European Economic Community has transformed the trading patterns of this and many other countries. None of us can foresee what changes may take place in future. The Government have disregarded the retention of a port transport industry with accountability to this place.

There is evidence also that interrelated industries such as shipping have been disregarded by the Government. Over the years, the British merchant fleet has been reduced to virtually nothing. That, too, has been at the heart of Britain's economy. There is no justification for the Government treating those industries in such a cavalier fashion.

The truth of the matter is made clear by hon. Members whose interest hinges on who is to get the rich pickings from the Bill—for example, land speculators. Many ports are in exactly the same position. Speculators in the port transport industry are not concerned about the industry. If there are rich pickings, that is where their interest lies, and they do not care about the future of the ports. Many hon. Members do not realise that a port is not comprised only of docks.

There are also river approaches, bays and so on. They must be subject to conservancy, buoyage and lights, which places a burden on the port transport industry. What will happen to such safeguards if and when ports are taken over by those who will not reinvest? Conservative Members know that they are interested in land for speculation which will go to the highest bidder for whatever purpose. That has been the Government's policy over the past 11 years.

Conservative Members tell us of the success over the past 11 years of the capitalist enterprise system. We are in the middle of a grave recession. Is that the success story of the past 11 years? The Government still pursue with vigour the ideology that they have followed for the past 11 years. At the moment, attention is being diverted to events in the Gulf. When the problems in the Gulf are over, people will again realise that the economy of this country should be on the agenda.

Conservative Members have no right to tell us of their successes of the past 11 years. That success story has brought about rising unemployment, damaged British manufacturing industry base and caused a grave recession. Conservative Members have a blatant cheek to lecture us on the benefits of the port scheme.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Loyden: I have very little time, so I shall not give way.

Several Members have rightly asked what safeguards there will be against predators. What does the legislation say about such safeguards? What provision will there be in the Bill to safeguard conservancy and the buoyage and lights of the ports? How will the legislation ensure that the ports are not sacrificed to money grubbers who come into the port to buy land cheaply and dispose of it at great profit to any bidder who comes along? Such people have no interest whatever in the port industry. That is a great danger for the ports.

We cannot leave the ports in the hands of this Government. I sincerely hope that my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench are making note of what is happening in the ports. We shall expect a dramatic change in the attitude of the next Labour Government to the port transport industry. The industry needs accountability. There is too much at stake to allow the ports of Britain to be run by any Tom, Dick or Harry who comes along and makes a bid for a port. I hope that the Minister will talk straight to the House and that in Committee the matters raised tonight will be properly considered and debated.

9.25 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) admirably illustrated the detailed concerns of Opposition Members about the ports industry and how it should fit into an integrated transport system. I have not heard Conservative Members express the same detailed concerns this evening.

Until now we have been forced to debate the merits of privatising trust ports in respect of particular ports—Clyde and Tees and Hartlepool. We discussed their privatisation under the pretext that it was private business. Yet throughout those debates Opposition Members knew that the private Bills were really Government measures introduced in response to Government pressure.

If there is still any doubt about that, we need look back no further than the Committee proceedings of the Finance Bill last year. Government amendments made it clear that the new private legislation would be out of the question unless it was accompanied by changes in the financial arrangements. The amendments passed assured the Government of receiving half the proceeds from the sale of the assets which, until then, were assumed to belong to local interests and the local community which had built up and developed the local trust ports undertakings, albeit with some grant from Government many years ago.

Only when the Treasury had spotted the pots of gold of which we have heard this evening did the Government make time for what had until then masqueraded as private Bills to be converted into a public Bill. Now at last we have the opportunity to debate the underlying principles of trust port privatisation. The comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) at the beginning of the debate underlined the fact that no real case has been made for privatising trust ports.

There will be time in Committee for the Opposition to oppose this privatisation measure. The time that will be available compares well with the limited amount of time in Committee on the two private Bills. Procedural problems thwarted real debate. Presumably the many Conservative Members who have spoken tonight will ask to serve on the

[Ms. Joan Walley]

Committee. Perhaps they will join the Opposition in tabling some amendments. It seems that a majority of those who have spoken favour the proposals that we suggest rather than this blatant privatisation measure.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Walley: No, because time is short.

Does the Minister agree that the private legislation currently going through Parliament was made redundant as soon as the Government announced their intention—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Walley: I am aware that many hon. Members—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should be given a proper hearing.

Ms. Walley: I am aware that many hon. Members wanted to speak and for that reason I do not intend to give way. It is important that the Minister has an opportunity to reply to the many points that have been made.

Has the private legislation going through Parliament been made redundant since the Government announced their intention—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Only one debate can take place in this Chamber at a time, and the hon. Lady is speaking at the moment.

Ms. Walley: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that debate is about the privatisation of the trust ports.

When the Minister replies will he tell us whether the Bill makes redundant the legislation currently before Parliament? We believe that it was made redundant as soon as the Government announced their intention to find time this Session to introduce this enabling legislation. During the debate, we have heard that there are serious anomalies. The point was made with particular reference to the Clyde Port Authority Bill.

The passage of private legislation to date has been a severe abuse of parliamentary procedure and of Finance Bill Committee procedure, and a waste of public money. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because two concurrent pieces of legislation have left us with an anomalous situation. The Government have not clarified where this leaves the Clyde Port Authority Bill and the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill.

The Government have no scruples about blurring the distinctions between what belongs to a local community and what belongs to taxpayers. They have no scruples about using taxpayers' money to reward future shareholders. That is clear from every other privatisation of public assets. As with the Trustee Savings bank, where ownership could not be clearly identified, they are blurring the distinction now with the trust ports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) began by showing that the Bill was about money and asset stripping, and the rest of his speech bore that out. Just like last year, when the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury had to move quickly on 15 March and had to introduce new clause 67 to the Finance Bill on 3 July 1990 to safeguard the Government's financial interests in the privatisation that was then going through Parliament, this measure is about finance. It has nothing to do with transport, other than that it is the Secretary of State for Transport who is presiding over the sale of public assets. If he cares about transport, he should be safeguarding the trust ports. Even the definition of trust ports is now about how much money such a port makes and how much its turnover is. It has nothing to do with transport infrastructure.

What have we heard from Government Members about the importance of trust ports and their place in an integrated transport system, where investment in the local infrastructure complements and underpins the national transport infrastructure, rather than undermining it? The main body of the Bill is about financial arrangements. Under this privatisation, it will be more important to pay the privatisation tax, to pay the levy and to invest in property than to invest in the local ports and build them up to serve the interests of the local community and economy.

So far, the Second Reading debate has failed to spell out the implications for trust ports. They can be bought by companies with scant interest in their operation as ports. We should remember to look at the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) about fishing interests. Companies will want to buy the trust ports to strip them of their assets. In doing so, they will increase the profitability of other companies in which they may already be involved. Those companies will have no commitment to run the ports for the local area. The Government are obsessed with profits, but at least those considering the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill have managed to wring from the Minister a commitment that that port authority will seek a local office in the area that the new plc will serve.

The Secretary of State said that the trust ports will be free to privatise, but even the British Ports Federation acknowledges that privatisation is not the answer to the development needs of some trust ports.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose*——

Ms. Walley: I shall give way in a moment.

When the Minister replies, he should say whether all the ports will be dealt with in the manner spelt out by the Secretary of State when he spoke of his commitment to compulsion.

Mr. Bruce *rose*——

Ms. Walley: In view of the time, I had better proceed.

Mr. Bruce: But the hon. Lady said that she would give way.

Ms. Walley: I shall give way if the hon. Gentleman's point relates to compulsion.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way so gallantly. In view of what she just said, can she confirm whether it is Labour party policy to take back all the ports into trust status and to reintroduce the dock labour scheme, which many of her Back-Bench colleagues would love?

Ms. Walley: I can only say that much depends on the timetable and the likely date of the general election. We shall consider the situation when we know that timetable.

Tonight we have heard a lot about level playing fields. We have been told that the Government have a stated

intention of introducing such a level playing field in terms of all ports—municipal, plc or trust. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) made particular reference to that. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what has happened to the draft European directive on state aids to ports, which was published in 1989, but has not seen the light of day since. Do not many continental ports receive massive subsidies for the development of new facilities? Where does that leave the concept of level playing fields?

The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) said that that port had not received a penny piece from the Government. That contrasts unfavourably with those infrastructure subsidies—they are not ruled out under the treaty of Rome—which other European countries give to develop their integrated transport structures. Most European Governments recognise that ports are part of the essential infrastructure, and they heavily subsidise their operating costs and investments. The Government, in comparison, do not have the same attitude.

The Bill is a further step towards establishing ports as business entities that provide their own resources with the minimum of state or local authority support. Trade will naturally be directed to the subsidised ports. The Government should be warned that, under the new arrangements, our ports could be taken over by European competitors. That would make the prospects for the British economy, already suffering from recession, even worse. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) that the Standing Committee should consider an offers ceiling on the amount that foreign companies can invest in the plcs which replace the trust ports. In Committee, I hope that the Government will consider what happens when the successor companies go bankrupt, a problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South drew attention.

The lack of reference in the Bill to an integrated transport policy is matched only by an omission of health and safety considerations and the need for an integrated environmental policy. Subsidiary companies will take over existing responsibilities, but Conservative Members and the Government have expressed little concern about conservancy and the detailed operations in the ports—maritime access, channels, lights, buoys, navigational aids, sea locks, breakwaters, docks, quays and reclaimed land. We need a regulatory body of some sort. During proceedingts on the Bill to privatise the water industry we heard a great deal about the need for such a regulatory body, and after much pressure on the Government we ended up with the National Rivers Authority. Have the Government any proposals for a similar body to deal with these issues?

How do the Government intend to resolve the potential conflict between a profit-maximising port operator and his responsibility for safety and conservancy? When the directors of the holding company and the statutory corporation are members of each other's boards, independence must be doubtful. How does the Minister envisage that the newly identified environmental objectives such as safe and environmentally sound management of the waste generated by ships in port and contingency plans for cleaning up spillages will be paid for under the new financial arrangements for trust ports?

Given the maritime and navigation security changes about which the Minister is consulting even now, what arrangements does he have in mind for security under the new plcs in the ports?

Trust ports have been responsible to their local communities; they have served local interests; and they have served the port industry. Today many Conservative Members have said that they agree with privatisation in principle, but that they do not want it for the port or constituency that they represent. In view of the decision announced by the Government on 4 December 1990——

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Walley: I will not, because there is no time.

Fifty-six national health service trusts were to be set up precisely to look after local issues and to enable local decision-making to go ahead——

Mr. Janman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order or of frustration?

Mr. Janman: It is a point of order. Is it in order for the hon. Lady to mislead the House by claiming that many Conservative Members are against the Bill, when that is clearly not so?

Ms. Walley: The Minister knows full well what I meant. He is the one who will have to deal with Conservative Members who do not fully support the proposals in the Bill.

The case for the privatisation of the trust ports has not been fully made; the case for a national strategy, in the ports industry is, however, overwhelming. The Bill does not give us such a strategy, and that is why we shall vote against it.

9.42 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): We have heard a confusing set of arguments from Opposition Members today. Listening to the first part of the speech of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), I had the impression that he was going to support the Bill, but then his arguments, as usual, became more confused. At one point he mentioned how trust ports are serving the community; at another, he said that a Labour Government would want to direct certain ports and invest huge sums in them. But how would ports not lucky enough to have been selected by that Government be able to serve their communities under the interventionist policies of the hon. Gentleman?

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred several times to the Rochdale committee, which sat more than 20 years ago and is thus not very relevant to the port industry today.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the Bill's sole purpose is to maximise some £5 billion for the Treasury. We expect the Bill to raise between £30 million and £50 million in its first year of enactment, so we shall have to look elsewhere to maximise a return of £5 billion.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) referred to the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990. There will be no exemptions in respect of private ports, because that legislation covers them, too. Any regulations that the inspectors consider necessary will be applied to those ports, as to others. However, when we consider that Act, it was made very clear that we would scrutinise the individual circumstances of each port, as they are all, by their very nature, different from one another.

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

I did not imagine that I would find myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), who said that he wanted to see the Government out of the ports. However, I agree. I want to see the Government out of the ports, and for them to become part of the private sector, as fully fledged independent bodies subject to no Government interference in the appointing of their boards. The only point on which I would part company with the hon. Member for Garston is that I want to see all Governments kept out of the ports, which I want to see thriving in the private sector.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend says that he wants all Governments kept out of ports. Will he extend that philosophy and introduce a clause that will keep all councils out of ports as well? Weymouth is not a trust port but is owned by the council. It was a profitable port when the Conservatives lost control of the council some years ago—but for 1991, the council is budgeting for an income of £400,000 and a subsidy of £750,000. What will the Government do about that?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman should tell the truth.

Mr. McLoughlin: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained, the Bill does not embrace local authority ports because they can be subject to privatisation under existing provisions. There is an important distinction to be drawn between local authority and trust ports.

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I distinctly heard—and I am surprised that you did not—the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) shout "Tell them the truth." I did tell the truth.

Mr. Speaker: That is a frivolous point.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Bill has two particularly unusual features. First, we are not seeking to privatise a single organisation—as we did, for example, in the case of British Airways. Nor are we seeking to privatise a finite and specified group of such bodies, as in the case of the electricity industry. Instead, our main objective is to lay down a framework that any of the trust ports will be able to use in selling themselves into the private sector, without the need to promote their own private Bills. I hope that I can reassure my hon.Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) by confirming that his port could come within the scope of the Bill as drafted, but not within the scope of the compulsion clauses—on which I shall comment later.

Secondly, the Bill is concerned with bringing fully into the private sector substantial bodies that have no direct owners and which can only be described as being owned only by the state. That gives rise to the issue, which some hon. Members find very interesting, of whether there should be a Government levy. By restricting the levy to 50 per cent., we are providing a substantial incentive to the trust ports to come forward for privatisation. That incentive is over and above the benefits that privatisation will itself bring to the ports and which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State described in opening the debate.

The benefits are such that the Clyde and Tees and Hartlepool port authorities brought forward their own Bills to privatise themselves before the opportunity arose for the Government to introduce the present Bill in its programme. It will be for those two authorities—I hope that this answers the question of the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North—to decide whether to press on with their private Bills or to withdraw them and seek privatisation through this Bill. I could well understand it if they took the view that they are likely to secure the benefits of privatisation more quickly by pursuing their private Bills than by waiting for the enactment of the Ports Bill and seeking privatisation thereafter.

If I may revert for a moment to the levy, hon. Members will see that the levy provisions in the Bill include, in clause 12(5), the possibility for the Secretary of State, with the consent of the Treasury, to vary the rate of levy. There is a similar possibility in the provisions about the clawback of part of the gains from subsequent land developments.

I noted the arguments put forward by a number of my hon. Friends about the time scale for the clawbacks. I think that at least three or four of my colleagues, including my hon. Friends the Members for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) and for Dover (Mr. Shaw), mentioned that issue. Obviously, we shall return to it in Committee, when we may want to discuss it in greater detail.

Mr. Moate: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that virtually everyone who has caught the Chair's eye today and some of those who did not—even though we represent the largest ports in the United Kingdom—has expressed support for the management-employee buy-outs and believes that the Secretary of State should give preference to such schemes? If he finds that the levy and clawback proposals militate against such buy-outs in favour of outside investment groups, will he undertake to discuss revising those rules with the Treasury so that, in every case where they are proposed, sensible schemes from management and employees would prove to be the winners?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am very sympathetic to the idea of management-employee buy-outs. That goes along the line that the Government have developed in the many privatisations that we have steered through the House. That line will ensure that——

Mr. Robert Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to show such discourtesy, instead of addressing the House?

Mr. Speaker: I had not noticed. I think that the Minister was addressing one of his hon. Friends on the Benches below the Gangway.

Mr. McLoughlin: I was saying that we hope that privatisation of the trust ports will continue with Government policy, which has meant that, through various privatisation measures, people who have worked in those industries for many years can play a proper role and start to own some of them. That is where our policy diverges so greatly from that of the Opposition, who are only interested in the state owning and people having no rights and powers in their own industries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) referred to management-employee buy-outs, and I am keen on that idea. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has opposed every privatisation measure which has been brought before the House by the

Government. The Conservative party have given rights to workers in industries, whether they are state-owned or, as in this case, trust ports, so that they can own part of the industry in which they work and which is so much a part of their livelihood.

If I may revert for a moment to the levy, hon. Members will see that the levy provisions in the Bill include, in clause 12(5), the possibility for the Secretary of State, with the consent of the Treasury, to vary the rate of levy. There is a similar possibility in the provisions about the clawback of part of the gains from subsequent land developments. That is in clause 16(6). I should explain the intention here. As I have explained, the Government believe that the 50 per cent. rate of levy is a fair one. We intend to apply that rate in all cases. But we believe that it would be a mistake to have to look to further primary legislation to make it possible to vary the rate. It would be wrong to speculate at this stage in what circumstances the Government might wish to do this, but it is, I think, a sensible precaution to have these provisions in the Bill.

It may be sensible if I elaborate on the question of ownership of the trust ports, which has been a matter of some significance in the framing of the Bill. I should make it clear from the outset that no one is arguing—certainly not the Government—that trust ports are not the direct owners of their assets and property. What is at issue is the ownership of the trust ports themselves. Hon. Members may recall that it was decided in another place in July 1987 that the Trustee Savings bank belonged to the state. This followed the passage of the Trustee Savings Banks Act 1985. The same principle applies to the trust ports.

Following that judgment in another place, the National Audit Office pointed out that it was open to the Government to consider whether parliamentary approval should be sought to enable the Crown to assume some measure of ownership of the Trustee Savings bank. The same considerations apply in the case of the trust ports; it is therefore for Parliament to decide who should benefit from the sale of the ports.

The Government, however, took none of the proceeds from the privatisation of the TSB. How, then, do they justify taking a 50 per cent. levy in the case of the trust ports? The trust ports are similar to the TSB in that they are trusts owned by the state, although not, of course, by the Government; but they are different from the TSB in a number of important respects. We consider that those differences justify the passing of a share of the proceeds to the Exchequer.

The ports themselves are, I think, concerned about several main issues in the Bill. The first is the levy on the sale of the ports, about which enough has already been said; the second is the clawback on gains from the development of land. As I have said, we shall deal with that point in a separate order and we shall welcome the views of the port industry. Another point of concern relates to when the Secretary of State will use his powers of compulsion. We decided on the two-year delay because we feel that it allows the ports substantial period during which to see the benefits of privatisation. Some ports already see those benefits, and will privatise quickly.

I take the points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Ward) and for Dover, about the anxieties felt by certain ports. We appreciate the importance of considering the ports individually and we shall take part in consultations before any decisions are made. I was pleased to hear from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that his party would be supporting the Bill—*[Interruption.]* I gather that he did not say that; I am not really surprised.

I was interested to read the following in *Lloyd's List International* not long ago:

"If you do not understand the question, sit on the fence—that seems to be the motto of the UK's Liberal Democrats when it comes to dealing with ports.

Only last year their 17 MPs managed to split three ways in the votes over abolishing the Dock Labour Scheme and now, it seems, ports privatisation is causing them a few problems as well.

In March, five Liberal Democrats voted against the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. So far so good. But this week five Liberal Democrats voted in favour of an almost identical Bill—seeking to privatise the Clyde Port Authority.

What is more, two MPs"—

the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—

"voted in different lobbies on each occasion. Even more surprising is the fact that their transport and shipping spokesman . . . did not vote . . .

The Liberal Democrats Press office seemed as perplexed by the issue as their MPs. When asked about a reason for the change of heart, back came the reply, 'I haven't got a clue.' Pressed further on the issue, the answer changed to 'such is life'."

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have not time to give way, although I am as keen as anyone else to find out the true views of the Liberal Democrats.

We have had an interesting debate. I look forward to the Committee stage of the Bill, when we shall be able to argue about some of the detailed points raised by a number of hon. Members. There is no doubt that the Bill is greatly wanted by a number of ports throughout the country: it will free them from the constraints under which they suffer as trust ports. The demand is clear; two ports have already introduced private Bills—which, as a number of hon. Members have pointed out, have already taken up a good deal of parliamentary time.

The Bill is the right way in which to privatise trust ports. Its passage will represent an important first step in the development of the ports industry. It is an important Bill, which marks a positive step forward for the ports industry. Without Government interference, the ports will be able to get on with the job. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 204.

Division No. 48] **[at 10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert	Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Aitken, Jonathan	Benyon, W.
Alexander, Richard	Bevan, David Gilroy
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Biffen, Rt Hon John
Amess, David	Blackburn, Dr John G.
Amos, Alan	Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Arbuthnot, James	Body, Sir Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Boscawen, Hon Robert
Ashby, David	Boswell, Tim
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Bottomley, Peter
Batiste, Spencer	Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bellingham, Henry	Bowis, John
Bendall, Vivian	Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. David Davis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet

Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

PORTS BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Ports Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of the provisions of the Act.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

PORTS BILL

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Ports Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) a levy on disposals of—

(a) securities; or

(b) rights to require the issue of securities;

of any company to which the undertaking of a harbour authority is transferred under the Act;

(2) a levy in respect of gains accruing to such a company on disposals of land which is the subject of such a transfer or of interests in such land or in land in which an interest transferrred by such a transfer subsists;

(3) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of all payments of levy under the Act, interest on unpaid levy and penalties in respect of levy.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Financial Services

10.15 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move,

That the draft Financial Services Act 1986 (Delegation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

The purpose of the order is to give to the Securities and Investments Board a power parallel to that of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the Financial Services Act 1986 to take action against an individual who may be making money or causing investors to lose money while contravening the conduct of business provisions under that legislation. The SIB has a power parallel to the DTI under the FSA to take such restitution orders against authorised persons or appointed representatives. The order would give it a similar power to take action, where appropriate, against people who are not authorised.

This is a small transfer of additional power which will enable the SIB to pursue one or two extra cases. In the interests of good regulation, I commend the order to the House.

10.16 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I welcome the order and the enhanced powers for the SIB that will result. Why has the Minister brought forward this parallel power for the SIB and DTI now? The Financial Services Act was introduced in 1986. Why has the order come forward now, rather than in 1988, 1989, or 1990? One must assume either that the SIB needed this power before, and without it has been functioning inefficiently, or that the DTI had the power and has not used it efficiently. Either the SIB has not had the full powers necessary to do its job or the DTI has not been doing its job. It would be useful if the hon. Gentleman would explain why he finds it necessary to introduce the order after so many years.

This is just another tinkering with the Financial Services Act. Because of the speed with which the legislation was introduced and the way in which it was cobbled together, we continue, week in, week out, to have these difficulties.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): "We"?

Ms. Mowlam: I mean "We". Last week, I talked to people in the City and to a unit trust group and asked them about the FSA's function. Giving an example of Government tinkering and the difficulties that have resulted since the legislation was introduced, they said that, since June 1989, they have had 24 consultative papers from the SIB, including three major ones, 90 changes to the SIB rulebook, 14 updates to the rulebook for the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, two complete rewrites of the IMRO rulebook, and an attempt to rewrite the rulebook in simpler language.

Mr. Smith: What is wrong with that?

Ms. Mowlam: The hon. Gentleman asks what is wrong with that. We have these changes month in, month out because of the way in which this cobbled together financial services legislation was introduced by the Government. The order is just another elastoplast applied by the Government to the SFA. The Government should be considering the surgery that will be needed to make the SFA work more efficiently for industry and investors as we move toward a single European market.

We must place the order in the context of Europe and the legislation that we hope will come as we move towards a single market. We hope that five directives will be in place to allow the single market to move forward in the 1990s. The order deals with fraud and protecting investors' money. As the previous financial debate was too early in the Minister's view, it would be useful if he would explain why we have not yet had a consumer directive from Europe. It is needed desperately. The Economic and Finance Council and similar organisations tell me that, although this small delegation order deals with one aspect of fraud in relation to investors and the City, we have no chance of having a consumer directive in place at the same time as the investment services, capital adequacy and other directives.

I dread to think what will happen, come the completion of the single market, when a Spanish investor is working through a French company with a subsidiary in Britain. Supposedly, home rules will function in those circumstances. Does the Minister really believe that that will constitute consumer protection in the 1990s? The Minister feigns support for consumer protection, but, as yet, we have seen little evidence in the European negotiations that that will be forthcoming in 1992.

Let me ask the Minister to clarify five points. First, why now? Secondly, will the Minister confirm that the present delegation order has nothing to do with the difficulties at Hamilton House? I understand that many investors await compensation following the problems and difficulties of Hamilton House and that the Securities and Investments Board is having trouble dealing with their problems because it has been waiting for months for the response from the Department that would allow the investors to get their money back. The worry is that, as a result, directors are taking money out of the country, and that money that could be recouped by restitution under an order such as this has not been obtained. Is Hamilton House at the back of the Minister's mind? Is that why he feels it necessary to delegate powers concurrently to the SIB and the Department?

Thirdly, will the powers that will be given to the SIB concurrently with the Department apply only to restitution of directors as individual unauthorised persons under the Financial Services Act, or will they also apply to accountants and solicitors? Who will the order, and the powers delegated to the SIB, cover?

Fourthly, will the order apply to cases such as Polly Peck and Levitt? If so, will it be used by the SIB; if not, why has not the Department used its powers already?

Fifthly, there have been reports in the press recently that many members of the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association are concerned that, because of the cost of compensation—particularly in the Levitt case, if that cost proves to be very high—the association will not be able to pay the necessary compensation. Does the order have something to do with the SIB and Levitt's difficulties? What is the Minister's response to those at FIMBRA who say that, if the Levitt case results in great demands for money, the present compensation scheme will not be able to handle those demands, or that, if it does, it will be at the expense of

independent intermediaries whose payments into the compensation scheme are at present higher than their payments for membership of FIMBRA?

Will the Minister come clean on those issues and explain what relation the order has to our regulatory system?

10.23 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam). The House respects the way in which she has followed these matters and her careful and close interest in them. She does a great service to the minutiae of the Financial Services Act 1986 by following up these matters and fulfilling her remit so well.

I welcome the order, which marks a further stage in the transition towards the transfer of power from the Secretary of State to the Securities and Investments Board. When the Financial Services Act was passed, many of us envisaged an increasing devolution of supervisory powers down to the SIB and we recognised that it had to be a tried and tested procedure.

I see in his place my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who played such a formative role in these matters. I think that he would agree that the careful balance that has been struck between self-regulation and central supervision has stood the test of time. The Government have been right to ensure that the Securities and Investments Board does not run before it can walk. In fact, the SIB has a creditable record, and I believe that the devolution of parallel responsibility for investigating the contravention of the status of authorised person or appointed intermediary represents an important devolution of power.

As, in the end, it comes down to people and to those who are authorised to conduct investment businesses, it is a great vote of confidence in the SIB that the Government and the Secretary of State are prepared to devolve this particular power. The order is not a technical or sidelining measure. It is an important reflection of the progress, responsibility and success of the SIB and the policy that the Government have enunciated and pursued since the enactment of the Financial Services Act 1986. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on presenting the order today.

10.25 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I, too, welcome the introduction of the order. I asked the Library how many orders had been made under the Financial Services Act 1986. I was told that this is the 61st order on the Library computer, which lists the orders subject to affirmative and negative resolutions and also commencement orders.

The flexibility of the Financial Services Act 1986 is demonstrated in the fact that it is possible to make such changes, which may simply be tinkering. However, each change is in response to new circumstances. The financial services industry is continually producing new products and it is inevitable that we will have new regulations. Regulations that simplify life for investment businesses are particularly welcome.

Ms. Mowlam: To what new product or simplification is the order related? It strikes me that the reality has not changed.

Mr. Smith: I was not suggesting that this order was before us as a result of a new product. The scene is changing, and the idea that we can have permanent rules and regulations is not realistic. The market is constantly changing, and it is inevitable that the rules and regulations made under the Financial Services Act will change in response. It is not realistic to suppose that we will have a long period during which there will be no changes to the rules. There are many proposals on the stocks at the moment which deal with new investment products—for example, unit trusts that allow people to invest in futures. I am not suggesting that this order deals with such a change. I shall be interested to hear my hon. Friend the Minister respond to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) and tell us why the order has been introduced today, because I cannot answer that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said, it is right that as the SIB becomes more experienced, more powers should be passed to it. As my hon. Friend said, that is a recognition of the fact that the SIB has made progress and is now widely respected. A mark of that was the award in the new year's honours list of a knighthood for Sir David Walker, which I welcomed. That was good news.

My only complaint about the order relates to the explanatory note. It would have been nice if the explanatory note covered what my hon. Friend the Minister said in his opening remarks. It is a typical explanatory note, in that it tells us nothing about the order. I had to look up the relevant sections in the Financial Services Act to discover what the order did. The explanatory note should be what it says and not a circuitous civil service effort that tells us nothing that we did not already know.

10.27 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): None of us wants to prolong our proceedings. I agree that the order makes further progress towards the devolution of powers to the SIB. I do not want to speak specifically about the order, but instead to take this opportunity, as the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) did, to voice one or two other concerns relating to the financial services industry generally.

I want to state first how much the people in the financial services industry in this country recognise the stand that my hon. Friend the Minister has taken in respect of the European Community directives, particularly on capital adequacy rules. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to learn that, as the people who work in the industry trundle off to bed tonight, they are thinking not about the order that we are considering, but about their future in relation to what will happen to capital adequacy. I encourage my hon. Friend to continue his fight.

When we discussed this matter right after the summer recess, my hon. Friend the Minister said that too many people were caught by the current interpretation of the exemption rules. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to press that matter. Without question, European Community directives pose a serious threat to the viability of the independent financial adviser in the next decade. It would be sad if that competitive industry, which is at the heart of what we wish to see in Europe, were destroyed in

[Mr. John Greenway]

the name of creating a European single market. I know that my hon. Friend recognises those matters, and I hope that he will continue to pursue them robustly.

The order also raises another matter to which the hon. Member for Redcar referred—the continuing problem of the compensation scheme. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I firmly believe that investor protection continues to be the Achilles' heel of the financial services industry. It is increasingly to the credit of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the Government's persistence with the measure that we have begun to expose people who should not be in the industry because they cannot be trusted to look after investors' money.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): There are many more around.

Mr. Greenway: However many there may be, the financial services legislation has created a mechanism that has exposed those who are dishonest in a way that the old Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 never did. For that reason, everyone in the industry recognises that there have been benefits from financial services legislation.

The corollary is that, in putting the compensation arrangements in place, we are in danger of threatening the existence of the independent sector which we wish to protect. Above all, I am concerned that the likely demands on independent financial advisers, small firms, and on people who are regulated by the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association or by the Insurance Brokers Registration Council to contribute to the compensation scheme could be such that they will either be driven out of business or will seek to become tied agents to protect their livelihoods. That would not be good for investor advice in the long term.

I do not expect my hon. Friend to respond to my comments tonight—I have raised a wider subject—but I am sure that he will understand that the debate provides an opportunity to remind him and the House that there are widespread concerns within our financial services industry about these matters. I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand why I felt that I should raise them.

10.32 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Financial Services Act 1986 was introduced with the best of good intentions. I do not know whether it has actually worked, but it has been proved to be hugely costly. The costs run into hundreds of millions of pounds, but still the Levitts, the Polly Pecks and hundreds of other crooks still seem to get through. It is not that the Act is too strong—in some ways it is too weak. One of the great problems is, that we have a system in which, before ne'er-do-wells can be brought to book, they must go through a vastly expensive and time-consuming legal system.

The Americans have something to teach us. Under their set-up, without having to go through their courts—their court process is much more long-winded than ours—they can fine people considerable sums. Salomons was fined $1·3 million the other day because of its ne'er-do-wells. That is a good thing.

If we should do anything, it is to make sure that, without all the vast expense, we give more confidence to the individual. It is not the Government's fault if crooks abound. Given the right backing, the City is one of the best policemen of itself that there has ever been. Let us take compensation. When the stock exchange was only individual stockbrokers, it literally guaranteed all its clients against loss due to the malfeasance of any stockbroker, but today the limit is £40,000. Yet the cost of malpractising brokers is about 20 times more than it was before the Financial Services Act 1986 was introduced.

The Financial Services Act 1986 may be a step in the right direction but how much does it genuinely support and defend the small investor? Investors still seem to lose tens of thousands of pounds to crooks. People such as Adam Faith are allowed to continue giving advice in the *Mail on Sunday*. We all know what his advice is worth. It is worth what someone will pay him for it. Financial journalists should be much better controlled. Unless we bring them to book and keep much tighter control of them, including those who tip—most people who tip have bought for themselves beforehand—we shall not progress. The Act deserves support, but there is still an awfully long way to go.

10.35 pm

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) for his helpful comments in support of the Securities and Investments Board and this transfer of powers and to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) for his favourable comments on the way in which the Government have progressively transferred powers to the SIB so that it can do the job that was enyisaged for it when the House passed the Financial Services Act 1986—the FSA. I take note of his comments on explanatory notes. I, too, prefer explanatory notes that are intelligible and give all the information required. I shall certainly seek to achieve that next time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) was right to worry about threats to independent financial advisers in Britain which may be posed by certain draft European directives. He can rest assured that, if there is anything that I can do to stop those unfortunate drafts being passed, I shall do so. Anything that he, as a powerful advocate for that sector, and his friends in the sector can do to put our joint case to Brussels and make sure that enough member states support our just cause, will be welcome. We must make a combined effort to make sure that our case is fully understood time and again in Brussels so that the directive can come out in the right shape.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale will be pleased to know that the Government are strongly committed to a strong independent sector for financial advice. He may have seen some reference in the past few days to my speech and a press release on the subject of commissions. That is another issue of importance to independent financial advisers. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) made the powerful point that the best protection for honest members of the profession—the vast majority—must be by the regulators finding the crooks and those guilty of misdeeds as quickly as possible in order to limit the losses, prevent hardship to retail customers and prevent the image of the entire industry being tarnished by the few wrongdoers.

That is the purpose of the Financial Services Act regime. As my hon. Friends have said tonight, there is evidence that such people are being found more quickly and that stronger action is being taken now that we have the regime. Both my hon. Friends can rest assured that I shall do anything in my power to make sure that the small minority who are guilty of misdeeds are brought to book, and that the regulators follow them as swiftly and completely as possible.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) asked several questions. She asked why we were bringing these powers forward now. It is now that the SIB has requested the transfer of the powers. That is as good a reason as any. We have progressively transferred powers to the SIB as it has sought them. It has sought this important power and we are happy for it to have it. The SIB may have cases that are appropriate for this treatment.

The hon. Lady asked me about a specific case. She must know that I will not tell her about any specific case in such a sensitive area. It is no help to the regulators to alert people to possible actions against particular businesses. I shall stick to my usual practice of making no comment on individual regulatory cases, for the good reason—I hope that she approves—that it would only make the task of the regulator more difficult.

Ms. Mowlam: I accept the point, however frustrating that may be at times. Can the Minister see that the logic of his argument without specific cases is that, if he grants this power concurrently to the SIB now, it is because it has asked for it? The SIB must have asked for the power because it feels that it needs that power to do the job efficiently. If the power at present lies with his Department, one must conclude that the Department is not doing its job efficiently.

Mr. Redwood: That logic does not work. Now or in future, the SIB will know in detail about cases which the DTI has left it to handle, where it thinks that the particular power would be useful. It would be an unnecessary expense and a waste of time and trouble to transfer all that information, interrupt the investigations or transfer the intelligence when it would be easier for the SIB to do the task. The hon. Lady's smile shows that she well understands that that is how this works in practice and why the proposal has come forward now.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Keep her smiling.

Mr. Redwood: To keep the hon. Lady smiling may be difficult, but it brings us naturally on to the subject of her lunches. I am glad to hear that she is now lunching in the City and learning about the important challenges facing the City.

The hon. Lady asked why there had been so many consultative papers from the SIB and changes in the rule books. It is because this is a dynamic industry, with constant changes in the range and style of products and services, which therefore raises new challenges to the regulators. The regulators want to hear what the City practitioners and the retail interests have to say about these proposals before regulating, so they issue consultative papers. There have been changes in the rule books for that reason, and because the SIB has introduced its new settlement which is designed to produce shorter, simpler, more intelligible rule books. That required the revision of the old ones, which were not satisfactory. I am sure that the hon. Lady, like me, will welcome that revision.

As for this being elastoplast, that is a silly image to choose. I wonder what surgery the hon. Lady is proposing. I ask her in every debate what this drastic surgery is that she would like to apply to the Financial Services Act.

Dr. Moonie: It is none of the House's business.

Mr. Redwood: So may it stand. It cannot be a serious criticism of the Government's policy if the alternative is not on offer and the House is not to be told what it may be.

The hon. Lady asked whether the action could take place against directors only, or also against others. She will be pleased to know that it could be taken against anyone who contravenes the FSA in the way specified in the order. That could include accountants or lawyers breaking the conduct of business rules and profiting by so doing. She can rest assured that this applies not just to directors, but to anyone who undertakes crooked work at the expense of the public.

The hon. Lady asked about the costs of compensation. I understand some of the worries of FIMBRA members in that connection. The main protection against unreasonable escalation of the compensation fund must be tight regulation to detect these things as early as possible, to nip them in the bud before they become expensive.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a problem—I entirely take his point about not wanting to deal with specific cases—with some recent frauds that have come to light in which losses have been incurred before the Financial Services Act was put in place? Given the Government's extremely generous response to the losses incurred by clients of the Barlow Clowes affair, does he accept that the Government will have to think carefully about how these people should be compensated for losses incurred before the regulations were brought into force?

Mr. Redwood: The question of who is eligible for compensation under the new regime is for the compensation fund. There may be cases that should be taken up with it on behalf of those who are seeking compensation. It is not for the Government to specify, as we do not run that fund.

As to whether the Government should do anything along the lines of the action taken in relation to Barlow Clowes, my hon. Friend will remember that there were special circumstances in that case. The most important point was the ombudsman finding against the Government. In the light of that and the number of people who had been affected, together with the concern expressed in the House about the matter, the Government decided to make the ex-gratia payment. I do not think that we can accept that, in all cases where there have been losses of any kind, at any date in the past, the Government should automatically make such payments. On that issue, I fear that I cannot help my hon. Friend as much as he would like.

I hope that I have answered all the questions raised, and I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

[Mr. Redwood]

That the draft Financial Services Act 1986 (Delegation) Order 1991, which was laid before the House on 19th December, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

VALUE ADDED TAX

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Value Added Tax (Construction of Dwellings and Land) Order 1990 (S.I. 1990, No. 2553), dated 13th December 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Road Traffic (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

Gas-powered Vehicles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

10.45 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I have already received two reactions in advance of my speech tonight on the possibilities of natural gas or hydrogen gas as a future fuel for vehicles.

The first reaction came from Mrs. Halliday, a lady whom I have never met and probably never shall. She telephoned me to say that, during world war two, methane-driven cars were used and that, in Wolverhampton, taxis ran on gas supplied by British Oxygen. I did not know that, and I am grateful to Mrs. Halliday for her helpful comments. I cannot say the same about the rather pathetic efforts of a local newspaper that managed the headline

"Chicken Dung Plan to Foil Saddam".

I have read and respected that paper for many years, and it is a pity that it can treat such a serious subject in such a flippant manner.

The majority of my speech relates to research that has been conducted in the United States. It is more fearful of oil shortages than the United Kingdom, for understandable reasons. When the United States had its first oil shock a few years ago, many Americans started to think about alternatives to total dependence on fossil fuels. Two thirds of the oil consumed in the United States is burned by motor vehicles, but at present there are no practical substitutes for oil. American experts say that the most likely alternatives to gasoline or diesel will be methanol, compressed natural gas and electricity.

The essence of the problem is the general lack of knowledge on the subject. In Britain, when a problem goes away, we tend to forget about it until it recurs. The problem about oil has resurfaced now because of the Gulf conflict.

As environmental problems become more serious, and are taken more seriously, natural gas becomes a more important fuel than those of us who use it for our central heating and cooking have ever thought. Apart from the sun, wind and water power, natural gas is by far the cleanest source of energy. It could be the fuel of the future for motor vehicles, which are the greatest cause of pollution on our streets now.

A refrigerator can run on electricity, kerosene or gas. It may surprise people to learn that most bits of machinery, including motor cars, can be run on such energy sources. We are used to conventional cars that use regular or unleaded petrol, or diesel. Most of us are aware that various forms of gas, mostly methane and gases derived from sewage, have been used in the past to power vehicles. I accept that such ventures have been undertaken mostly out of curiosity or to promote a particular enterprise. For some years, Anglian Water has used escort vans powered by its home-produced gas. Such project have been experiments rather than serious operations.

Electric milk floats are common, but no one has ever produced a battery sufficiently compact, swift to charge and sufficiently powerful to take a full-sized vehicle on the road for the normal distance required in the working day.

Why gas? At this time of the Gulf war, which is at least partly oil-related, there is every logic in looking for a basic

fuel for vehicle propulsion that has its source in those countries that do not want to be dependent upon oil from the middle east.

In future, electricity generation will turn largely to gas in a co-generation role as opposed to the previously more conventional coal, or the long expected, but frankly distrusted, nuclear power.

In the past, everyone has assumed that gas, a finite substance, would run out at the end of this century or not far into the next century. For basically commercial reasons, gas stocks have always been underestimated. There is no doubt now that supplies in Europe alone are enough to keep us going well into the middle of the 21st century.

Gas is far less damaging to the environment than coal, or petroleum products. If I seem to swing between electricity generation and vehicle propulsion, that is simply because, for far too long, we have lived under a rather stratified form of science which assumes that energy for electricity generation comes from coal or nuclear and that energy for motor cars comes from petroleum products. When pressed, experts may accept that there are possibilities in gas or electric or even steam-driven vehicles, but these are considered unimportant, almost amusing, relics of past research.

The problem with new ideas is always that no one knows whether they will work in practice, even though they work in theory. So it was with gas vehicle propulsion. But no longer, although I was surprised to have to travel to Minnesota to find such propulsion not only acceptable but becoming almost mandatory at state level as a method of economic and environmentally sound propulsion.

In the USA, with its speed limit of 55 miles an hour, gas propulsion is acceptable, and I find it similar to diesel. Certainly gas-propelled vehicles have slower acceleration, but they have a good cruising speed and excellent fuel economy.

Ingenuity is the hallmark of the new gas engineer. In Minnesota, gas spigots are installed free of charge in people's garages if they possess a gas-powered car. They drive in at night, fill up overnight and drive off next morning without needing to fill up at a service station.

New service stations are now required to have facilities to fill up vehicles with gas as well as with diesel or petrol. That is all very sensible, but by and large none of these things have happened or even been accepted in this country as yet.

I chair the all-party alternative energy group, which is not against any form of power generation but which is much in favour of conservation—that famous fifth fuel —and the use of fuels which are efficient, economic and low in pollutants. Alas, I do not expect in my time to be able to offer the House a water-propelled car, but one day H_2O may be split into hydrogen and oxygen and we shall get our gas fuel, if not from the tap, then at least from a local source.

I submit that gas propulsion is not only not eccentric but the logical future method of propulsion. It is economical to use, although I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would soon slap the equivalent of a petrol tax on if it became a standard fuel. But my argument in favour of Government support, and Government consideration is also a request to the private commercial sector to consider whether it should not look at something unusual but not illogical. We have gone from theory to practice. For many years, we have been able to convert petrol-driven cars to gas, with a bulk cylinder filling the boot. Indeed, one of my hon. Friends has run a vehicle twice around the clock using gas. Yet I suspect that hon. Members did not know that or realise that the effect had been achieved.

For years, this conversion method has worked, and now the Americans are building cars with engines designed to run on gas. That is the logical way forward. General Motors has manufactured such a car, codenamed GMC 3500, I believe. Toronto Transit uses 40-seater buses that run entirely on natural gas.

Mrs. Sandra Hale, commissioner of administration in Minnesota, has said:

"The Mideast crisis has made energy conservation fashionable again but, in Minnesota state, good energy conservation never went out of fashion. When our Country's petroleum supplies were threatened in the 1970s, Governor Rudy Perpich initiated energy conservation measures that carried the State through the crisis. These measures became a permanent part of State operations because they made sense for the longer term. The results have been impressive."

Energy-efficient compact vehicles predominate. Minnegasco is the local natural gas distributor in Minnesota. With its help, more than 20 commercial fleets have been converted to natural gas propulsion.

Also in the United States of America, the solar energy research institution in Golden, Colorado, is working on clean fuels such as the hythane system, whereby natural gas is blended with hydrogen towards an ultimate clean vehicle fuel. Nearer home, according to *Automotive Engineering*, May 1990, BMW is researching hydrogen-powered engines for some of its luxury cars. It will take a long time to make the full transition, but the beginning is there.

In the United Kingdom, British Gas recently acquired —with good timing, in view of my debate—Consumers Gas of Ontario, Canada's largest gas distribution company. British Gas is far from being some dreary old utility. It is now a huge international group seeking, treating and selling gas worldwide. Its chairman, Mr. Bob Evans, is a frequent visitor to the House, and confirms that the new company is fully committed to caring for the environment. He intends to spend $30 million in Canada on research and development, much of which will concentrate on the use of gas to power vehicles.

There are other good things to come. The Ricardo Group, a British research and development company, claims that natural gas is a high-quality engine fuel, and that existing petrol engines can be easily converted to use it. But that is the past. The group is now testing prototype gas bus engines on behalf of the co-Nordic natural gas project. This involves a consortium of five major Scandinavian urban bus companies, with the tightest emission controls anywhere in the world. There is already acceptance that the system works, and people are experimenting—but not shouting the news as loudly as I would like. British Gas, the leader, has been in the field for many years, and is now committed to research and development.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to put a question to him in his very interesting debate. As he said, I have been running my car on liquid petroleum gas for 13 years to remarkably good effect in terms of engine wear, and of feeling clean environmentally. However, it has been enormously frustrating to see the negative pricing policy adopted by

[Mr. Colin Shepherd]

retailers, plus the Government's negative taxation policy, lead to a steady reduction in the number of outlets, so that liquid gas is now hardly available throughout the country. I am fortunate that I still have access to it.

Does my hon. Friend agree that British Gas and others must develop an aggressive, competitive and outgoing positive policy, and should educate retailers of the advantages? Above all, the Government must adopt a positive taxation policy that will result in it being in the interests of the public to use that alternative and very effective fuel.

Mr. Speller: I can only agree with my hon. Friend, and I thank him for his endorsement of the policy that I suggest.

The Government showed great sense in their tax policy on unleaded fuel—which, although it may be more expensive to produce, is cheaper to buy. That was the first good sign. If interests such as British Gas are serious—I believe they are—they will have to develop a countrywide distribution system, though probably starting in London and the south-east. If that is not done, the whole concept will come to naught.

Manufacturers must follow the lead of General Motors and acknowledge the need for clean-fuel cars. Britain and the whole of Europe are now prepared to talk clean motoring as well as just plain motoring.

It would also be good to be independent of oil supplies from the middle east and to lower particulate emissions. Although Britain has its own oil resources, it has even greater gas resources. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister not for cash—which makes a pleasant change these days—but to support such research as may be sought. On the commercial side, it is important for the Government not just to make an appraisal of the possibilities but to level the playing field between the various forms of motor fuel. I believe that gas is the logical fuel of the future. We have it. It should be cheaper. It is certainly cleaner—and it makes good sense to many of us to use it.

10.59 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on obtaining this debate, because he has made a stimulating contribution on a subject of which many hon. Members are blissfully ignorant. I am sure that in the years to come many people will read his speech and will say that, as chairman of the all-party alternative energy group, he has yet again made a valuable contribution. Certainly gas-powered vehicles are an interesting subject and one that we must take seriously in our search for more environment-friendly road transport.

At present, the Government are targeting vehicle emissions. We are successfully encouraging the use of unleaded fuel and we have recently agreed in the European Community, tough emission standards for all types of new car which will take effect from the end of next year. We are now seeking much tighter standards for lorries. Later this year we shall introduce a totally new emissions check into the MOT test to encourage people to keep their engines in tune.

Alternative fuels are a good example of an area where one needs to consider the trade-off between the advantages and the disadvantages. Solving one environmental problem by switching from one fuel to another can often create another—or there may be an economic penalty. The objective must be to get the balance right in each case. So what role do we see for alternative fuels?

A very wide range of alternative fuels is in principle possible, but there are no panaceas. It is necessary to consider not only the environmental benefits but other factors, such as the practicality of the fuel for road vehicle use, availability, refuelling and supply infrastructure and cost. The possibilities include LPG, natural gas, electricity and hydrogen, among others. Some of those are already in use to a limited extent in some countries—for example, natural gas in New Zealand and electric vehicles in this country, where by world standards we have a large fleet of electric vehicles. Others, such as hydrogen, are at the experimental stage.

The Government recognised many years ago the benefits of natural gas as a clean, convenient fuel for domestic and industrial use. Since the exploitation of resources in the North sea began in the early 1960s, gas production has increased steadily. In 1989, 45 billion cu m was being produced from 28 offshore gas fields and one onshore field, at a value of about £2·1 billion. Four new offshore fields began production in 1989. There are reserves of between 560 and 1,770 billion cu m, which is estimated to be between 10 and 30 years' consumption at the current rate of 55 billion cu m per year.

Recently, concerns about global warming have focused attention on the use of fuels such as natural gas instead of the conventional fossil fuels, oil and coal. These fuels have low carbon-to-hydrogen ratios and produce less carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas.

The successor companies to the Central Electricity Generating Board—PowerGen and National Power—are considering projects to generate electricity from natural gas using energy-efficient combined cycles of gas and steam turbines. A number of other companies are making similar plans in competition with PowerGen and National Power.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) regulations permit the use of gas as a fuel for road vehicles, but the only type of gas allowed by the regulations at present is liquefied petroleum gas. This can be stored in liquid form at comparatively low pressures—about 250 psi—and has been used as a fuel in motor vehicles for many years, but not in large quantities, at least in this country.

The use of any other gaseous fuel in road vehicles is prohibited by the regulations. This is because the detailed requirements cater only for gases at the sort of pressure found in LPG systems.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Will my hon. Friend recognise and look into the argument that I tried to make in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller)—that liquid petroleum gas has not been more widely used in this country, as compared with Holland and western Canada, because the taxation structure has been wrong, and the Government have had a large role in the lack of uptake of gas-powered vehicles?

Mr. Chope: I shall certainly look into that. It is a responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I know that my hon. Friend has first-hand knowledge of this subject. I am sure that my right hon.

Friend the Chancellor will be interested in his experience, and I will ensure that these comments are drawn to his attention.

Compressed natural gas has to be stored at very much higher pressures—up to 3,000 psi—and compressed to very high pressure to store reasonable quantities in the vehicle. This requires much stricter standards for safe storage and use. That is why the number of vehicles using CNG is very small, and the number of special approvals that we have given is also very small. If the demand for the use of CNG were to increase, we would have to consider an amendment to the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations, setting out standard specifications for the gas systems to be used.

We permit reputable organisations to experiment with CNG in road vehicles, but they must apply to the Department of Transport for approval, with details of the gas system that they propose to use, its design specifications and how they propose to inspect and test it. At present, to my knowledge, three organisations hold such approvals, with 29 vehicles running on the roads. In the past, some have experimented with gas reclaimed from waste disposal areas, but all are now obtaining their supplies from the gas mains.

British Gas plc recently said that it wishes to promote the use of CNG in road vehicles, and it is setting up an organisation for that purpose. As my hon. Friend said, it is currently setting up field trials in the United Kingdom which will make use of experience in the Netherlands and Canada—the latter arising out of the recent acquisition of Consumers Gas. A great deal of work will need to be done before any results become apparent, but my officials are working in collaboration with British Gas to formulate suitable specifications for the gas system for inclusion in the regulations. Early developments in this market are likely to be in relation to commercial vehicle fleets having the relevant characteristics, and that is where the important environmental benefits will be most evident. I must stress, however, that it will be a long time before vehicles running on CNG are commonly available for the private motorist.

Natural gas has advantages, in that it is abundant and its CO_2 emissions can be about 30 per cent. lower than those of petroleum fuels. However, natural gas, or methane, is itself a greenhouse gas, and must be compressed or—in what are at present rare cases—liquefied when used in vehicles. One survey taking possible methane losses and compression and liquefaction into account puts the relative greenhouse emissions of natural gas used in vehicles at 19 per cent. lower for CNG and 15 per cent. lower for liquefied gas, compared with those in vehicles using conventional fuel.

But that advantage is largely offset if account is taken of performance and space standards. That stems partly from the weight and space penalties associated with storage of CNG in the vehicle, and the likelihood that any transition to CNG vehicles would involve dual fuelling, so that cars use petrol or CNG.

Mr. Speller: I am interested to know why a vehicle running on gas must be able to run on petrol as well. No one has suggested that a vehicle that runs on petrol should also be able to run on gas. I hope that my hon. Friend will also mention the great advantage of independence from suppliers in the middle east.

Mr. Chope: There is certainly no reason why a vehicle should not run solely on CNG, but, if the supplies are not readily available, it is understandable that many vehicle owners will want dual fuelling. As, during the transition, only a limited amount of CNG would be available, most vehicle owners would demand dual-fuelling facilities.

New petrol-fuelled cars will soon be much cleaner, with the introduction of stringent limits which will reduce noxious emissions by about 80 per cent. compared with the current limits. A petrol engine meeting those new standards would require accurate fuel management and a catalytic converter, but would produce lower noxious emissions than one powered by natural gas without a catalytic converter. There is no fundamental technical reason why cars using natural gas cannot be designed to meet the new emission limits, but clearly any relative percentage differences between fuels will then be of much less importance in absolute terms, as only very low emission levels are permitted.

In the case of heavy-duty engines for lorries and buses, the very low levels of particulates associated with natural gas may prove a useful advantage, but the CO_2 advantage in use relative to diesels is lower. Operators of such vehicles are very sensitive to range and cost factors, but in some countries CNG has been used to a limited extent in bus fleets. Some fleet operators may find the special refuelling facilities and operating costs worth while, and the drawbacks of reduced load space and reduction in performance acceptable for their particular operations.

But even in countries where CNG has established a reasonably large presence numerically, the vast proportion of vehicles still use conventional petroleum fuels. On that basis, it is likely that the vast majority of vehicles in the United Kingdom will continue to use petrol and diesel in the medium term. The small proportion of the fleet using natural gas would have a limited benefit in reducing CO_2 emissions, but that would not be a complete solution.

My hon. Friend mentioned the desirability of alternative sources of energy. The point is well taken, but we must have regard to practicalities and, with the best will in the world, I do not think that it would be possible at present to convert the whole British vehicle fleet to take CNG, although, if my hon. Friend has his way, it will come about sooner rather than later.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Is it not a question of the whole process being incentivised, to use a horrible word? If those who set the parameters wish there to be an increase in the use of alternative fuels, a structure must be devised for it, just as happened with unleaded fuel—to great effect.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend has a point, but the point made by hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North was that in Minnesota there is quite widespread use of CNG. I understand that the tax on petrol in the United States is much lower than it is here. Therefore, one cannot necessarily say that in the United States there is an incentive to use CNG which does not exist here. Due to the higher petrol taxation in this country, one might expect there to be greater incentive to use CNG.

This is a welcome debate, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North for his positive contribution to it. Improvements in the efficiency of conventional vehicles, which constitute the vast majority of the fleet, still offer the greatest potential benefits in helping to limit CO_2 and other emissions from road

[Mr. Chope]

transport. We wish to encourage the development of vehicles powered by currently unconventional sources of energy. We see some long-term potential for CNG vehicles in our continuing efforts to improve the environment.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I give you notice that I shall be objecting to all eight private Bills in order to encourage the Government to come forward with proposals to reform private business.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, it might be for the convenience of the House if I put all eight Bills together. [HON. MEMBERS: "Object."] In that case, I shall put them singly.

AIRE AND CALDER NAVIGATION BILL

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (No. 2) BILL

HOOK ISLAND (POOLE BAY) BILL

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (No. 2) BILL

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords]*

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 31 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Training

1. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last discussed training with his opposite numbers in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France and *(c)* Italy.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I have met my opposite numbers in Germany, France and Italy on a number of occasions and have discussed a wide range of employment and training issues with them.

Mr. Holt: That is a marvellously bland answer. Has my right hon. and learned Friend specifically discussed with his opposite numbers on the continent why they do not have the same shortage of skilled people as we have? They have better education and training involvement, they do not have the rigid school leaving age that we have and they have a wider diversity of opportunity in education and training for their young people. Why is it, therefore, that we stick slavishly to a school leaving age of 16 and a single type of comprehensive school, resulting in a lack of opportunity for our young people?

Mr. Howard: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend was emphasising the marvellous or the bland in his original comment. The school leaving age is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that taxpayers—the Government—spend more on training young people in Britain than is spent in Germany, France or Japan and we are increasingly seeing the results of those efforts.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Secretary of State must know that every employer, particularly in engineering, is short of skilled labour because major redundancies in engineering in the past 10 years have meant that there has been no training of apprentices. Should not we take a leaf out of the Germans' book and train more apprentices, particularly adult apprentices?

Mr. Howard: We are addressing those problems and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the great effort that is being made through, in particular, the training and enterprise councils to improve the level of skills throughout our economy. Those efforts are achieving considerable success.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the latest European statistics show that, as a proportion of labour costs, British firms spend as much on training as do their German counterparts? We are spending in the region of £20 billion a year now on training—a dramatic increase during the past few years which shows the new emphasis being given to training in British industry.

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is noteworthy that, even in today's CBI quarterly survey, which is not in every respect a cheerful document, there is

a healthy positive balance in the number of employers who intend to continue to increase their investment in training compared with those who do not.

Mr. McLeish: Why is there such overwhelming complacency, indifference and ambivalence in the Government's attitude to training? Why is it that, after 11 years discussing training with his European colleagues, we still do not have a coherent system of training for 16 to 19-year-olds, the unemployed are abandoned as cash cuts hit and unemployment rises and more than 50 per cent. of employees in British industry receive no training? When will the cuts stop? When will the Government abandon voluntarism and give some leadership in the skills crisis?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. We have a clear and coherent training strategy and it is working well. The people who need to get their act together are the members of the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) goes round the country saying how splendid training and enterprise councils are, whereas the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) goes round saying that they are a terrible mistake.

Social Charter

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met Commissioner Papandreou to discuss the social charter.

Mr. Howard: I met Mrs. Papandreou on 14 January to discuss the Commission's social action programme and priorities for social affairs in the Community in 1991.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the social charter, by imposing similar obligations across the Community, guarantees greater unemployment among poorer member states? Is he aware that the Trojan horse that is the social charter will force nearly 2 million low-paid people in the United Kingdom to pay national insurance contributions for the first time?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to those aspects of the social action programme that would damage employment prospects and impose heavy and unacceptable burdens on employers in this country and elsewhere. That is why we are continuing to resist the proposals and our opposition is attracting increasing support from other member states.

Mr. Paice: Next time my right hon. and learned Friend meets Commissioner Papandreou, will he express the fact that, although many of us support strongly the Community's action in moving towards a single market, we greatly object to the way in which it is using that development to interfere in sectors of life that are far removed from anything to do with training matters and are properly the responsibility of the House?

Mr. Howard: There is a good deal of force in my hon. Friend's remarks—particularly his observation about the extent to which the Commission is attempting to use the treaty's single market provisions to promote proposals relating to other areas that should not be based on qualified majority voting. I have consistently made that point in the Social Affairs Council and that argument is gaining the increasing support of other member states.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Secretary of State cannot have it both ways. Obviously, he vehemently opposed the social charter in every jot. We now learn that he accepts half of it—and in particular that he is prepared to support the action programme for women. Survey after survey shows that the biggest handicap confronting women in the workplace is meeting their child care obligations and matching them to their work. Given that child care facilities in this country are as bad as anywhere in Europe, what will the Government do to promote adequate child care and flexible working hours so that the nation can benefit from the resource of women back at work?

Mr. Howard: We have always made it clear that we would examine all the proposals in the social action programme on their merits, and we have done so from the start. I am astonished to hear the hon. Gentleman ask for flexible working hours to help women who want to work, when Labour has adopted an entirely uncritical attitude to the programme, which includes proposals that would impose the most stringent limits on part-time working. That would prove much more burdensome for employers and sharply reduce the opportunities to work available to women. The hon. Gentleman should adopt a more consistent approach.

Tourism

3. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take to encourage the growth of employment in the tourism industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): In 1990, the tourism industry employed 1·4 million people—25 per cent. more than in 1981. The numbers of self-employed people in the industry grew by 17 per cent. between 1981 and 1989. The Government will continue their substantial financial support for tourism and the industry must also play its part by negotiating realistic pay settlements.

Mr. Speller: Given curent international events, does my hon. Friend agree that this will probably be the last year ever for the British tourist, hotel and catering industries to promote an increase in the number of holidays taken in this country and to seek to attract back to Britain the many holidaymakers who, for many reasons, good or bad, have chosen in the past to holiday overseas? Does my hon. Friend further agree that there must be more investment if Britain is to offer holidaymakers the best value for money anywhere in Europe?

Mr. Jackson: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important to take advantage of the situation, even though it is rather grave on the tourism front because of the impact of the Gulf war. The promotional efforts to which he referred are important and there is a real challenge to encourage home tourists to make more use of facilities here. The timing of the promotion is of the essence, but it is for the industry, in conjunction with the British tourist authorities, to decide how to do it.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Is the Minister aware that many small independent travel agents are expressing deep concern about employment prospects for their employees as a result of the crisis to which he referred? Will the Government be taking any steps to reassure them that

their jobs will not be lost as a result of the problem, perhaps through increased advertising to encourage people to visit this country in the coming year?

Mr. Jackson: The position is serious, but it affects us all. The Government are well aware of the terrorist threat to this country. Excellent security arrangements are in place and we are intensifying them. I pay tribute to the people involved in enforcing those arrangements. However, we must try to sustain a spirit of business as usual and it is for the industry to look after itself.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will my hon. Friend examine ways in which the Government can help to spread tourism so as to increase the possibility of employment in the industry in parts of the country other than those currently benefiting from it? Does he recognise that there is some concern in towns such as Bath, Cambridge and Oxford, which already attract a substantial number of tourists? Does he recognise the case for trying to promote tourism in other parts of the country which do not have as many tourists?

Mr. Jackson: I agree with my hon. Friend, but, as he knows, recently there was a review of such matters and various institutional changes were made. It is Government policy to encourage diversification and the spread of the opportunities represented by tourism.

Labour Statistics

4. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are employed in the north-west region.

Mr. Jackson: In September 1990 the civilian work force in employment in the north-west stood at 2,890,000, which was an increase since 1983 of 14 per cent. or about 366,000 new jobs.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Can I have a straight answer to a simple question, with no waffling and no misrepresentation of statistics? Have high interest rates and the high rate of sterling at entry into the European exchange rate mechanism damaged employment prospects in the north-west of England and the county of Cumbria? Are those two factors contributing to escalating unemployment? If the Minister is willing to concede that they are, what special measures can he now introduce to deal with the problems in the north-west of England? What is he going to do?

Mr. Jackson: I understood that entry into the ERM was Opposition policy. It is common ground among the parties in the House that inflation has to be brought down. Although there is some argument about how one achieves that, I think that everyone accepts that a consequence of any policy to reduce inflation is that the economy will slow down. We have to live with that, but we must try to ensure that the rise in unemployment is minimised. We must also look carefully at wage settlements to ensure that unions and employees do not demand too much and that employers do not award wages that are unsustainable by the business.

Mr. Butler: Is my hon. Friend aware that 150 jobs at the nuclear construction facility at Daresbury are threatened because of the ever-escalating contributions to CERN—the centre for European nuclear research? Will he have a word with his colleagues at the Department of Education and Science to ensure that we do not continue to export jobs because of grandiose European ventures?

Mr. Jackson: This matter relates more to my previous responsibilities than to my present ones. I note what my hon. Friend says and I will draw the attention of my colleagues in the Department of Education and Science to his remarks. However, it is rather an over-simplification to say that it is a choice between CERN and Daresbury. There are important European facilities, which involved Daresbury, at the Institut Laue Langevin in Grenoble. My hon. Friend is using over-simplistic terms.

Mr. Alton: Has the Minister noted the complaint made to the Merseyside chamber of commerce that the uniform business rate has cost industry and enterprise in the north-west and the midlands an additional £520 million this year? Does he agree that that has placed a downward pressure on jobs in the region? What measures will he take to protect small businesses and industries during the recession?

Mr. Jackson: I am surprised by what the hon. Gentleman says about the impact of the uniform business rate in the north-west. Let me repeat that the key to the problem of unemployment is the attitude of employers and employees to wage settlements. We must all work together to ensure that unemployment is minimised through the achievement of reasonable settlements.

Mr. Dunn: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Opposition and the truth have been strangers for years? Will he also confirm that there are more jobs in the north-west—as there are in Britain as a whole—than there have been for many years?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the national figures show a substantial increase in the rate of employment in Britain.

Workplace Accidents

5. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Government propose to take any new initiatives to reduce the number of workplace accidents.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Primary responsibility for maintaining and improving health and safety in the workplace rests with employers and others. The Health and Safety Commission's regulatory and the Executive's enforcement roles are complemented by their giving guidance and advice to stimulate employers and others to act to raise standards. Their current priorities for action are set out in their plan of work for 1990-91 and beyond, which the Secretary of State helped to launch in July last year.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that the Government are guilty of gross negligence in regard to safety at work? If he studies the article in *The Guardian* of 24 November which deals with the tragic death of George Kenyon at Holt Plastics in Haslingden, he will learn that, in 1988-89, there were 697 deaths at work and nearly 200,000 serious injuries. Since 1981, there has been a massive increase in the number of accidents and a

reduction of over 900 in the number of inspectors. Is not it time that the Government did something to reduce that appalling figure?

Mr. Forth: Let me make it clear that I make a practice of never studying articles in *The Guardian:* I therefore cannot comment on the article to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong in every respect. First, the Health and Safety Commission has told us that it has the resources for which it asked, and is therefore well able to deal with workplace accidents—which it does very competently and professionally. Secondly, the House should not be misled by what the hon. Gentleman said about that tragic incident. As I am sure he knows, it resulted in charges of manslaughter and, indeed, a manslaughter conviction. The charges were brought jointly by the Health and Safety Executive and the Crown prosecution service.

The rate of fatal accidents at work has fallen consistently throughout the 1980s. That, surely, is cause for tribute to be paid to the work of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive rather than for the sort of ill-informed criticism that we heard from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Madel: In view of certain horrific accidents that took place last year, will the Health and Safety Commission introduce new regulations governing the transport of hazardous substances on the roads?

Mr. Forth: That is a matter for the commission and one of which it is well aware. It will be working constantly —as it already does—across the whole area of health and safety to ensure that the existing regulations are appropriate to current developments and that its resources and policies ensure the maximum safety of people in the workplace and between workplaces.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister accept that accidents are caused by either carelessness or negligence? Will he encourage the placing of more emphasis in schools on the need for improved care and safety practices among young people who are about to go into industry? Will he also encourage employers to allocate funds for training, so that more individuals with health and safety qualifications are employed in industry?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point: that although carelessness and negligence are the main contributory factors, accidents are caused, at least in part, by lack of information and awareness among both employers and workers about the need for safety. The Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive have produced a number of excellent publications. They work with trade associations and industry to ensure that everyone is fully informed about the requirements of safety in the workplace and of the regulatory framework within which they must operate. That is something of which we are well aware and constant attention is devoted to it. I shall certainly pass on the hon. Gentleman's recommendations to my colleagues at the Department of Education and Science so that we may ensure that schools, too, are made aware of the need for safety.

Gulf War

6. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what circulars he has issued to his local offices in relation to employment policy and recruitment for service in the Gulf.

Mr. Howard: Local offices of the employment service have been issued with guidance covering the employment rights of members of the reserve forces on discharge to civilian life. No other guidance has been issued in relation to service in the Gulf.

Mr. Dalyell: What role has the Minister's Department played in the devising of conscription forms? What is departmental thinking on the proposition, which is extremely unacceptable to many hon. Members, that 18 to 25-year-old unemployed males should be conscripted first?

Mr. Howard: There is no question whatever of introducing conscription, nor is there any need to do so. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that during the past few weeks recruitment offices have been inundated with volunteers.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will my right hon. and learned Friend allow me to take this opportunity to commend those British civilians who are serving in the Gulf and ensuring the success of the war effort? Their courage at this vital time should not be forgotten.

Mr. Howard: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute to all our citizens in the Gulf—civilians as well as those in the armed forces.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a matter of considerable pride in the United Kingdom that our forces are made up of professionals, backed by adequate numbers of volunteer reservists and auxiliaries, and that there is no shortage of people coming forward to serve our country and the United Nations in the Gulf?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The performance of our forces in the Gulf, regulars and reservists, has won the admiration of the whole world.

Mr. Ron Brown: If conscription becomes necessary, do not the young people of this country have a democratic right to refuse to accept their draft papers? Even if the Government believe to the contrary, do not they have that democratic right?

Mr. Howard: As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), there is no question of introducing conscription. The hon. Gentleman's questions, therefore, simply do not arise.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend congratulate companies that have enabled reservists to respond to the call to serve in the Gulf, particularly the health authorities that have allowed medical reservists to go there? Will he assure the House that no stone will be left unturned to ensure that their job security is maintained after the war has ended?

Mr. Howard: I am happy to give that assurance to my hon. Friend and the House. The Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985 entitles reservists to return to their jobs after full-time service.

Manufacturing Employment, Leeds

7. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of manufacturing employment in Leeds during 1990.

Mr. Jackson: I am afraid that the most recent census of employment that we have is for September 1987. It gives the estimates for local areas. In that month, 68,200 employees were employed in manufacturing industries in the Leeds travel-to-work area.

Mr. Battle: Is the Minister aware that those figures represent a real decline in the manufacturing base of the city of Leeds? Is he also aware that the recession is hitting hard the printing, engineering and textile industries—so much so that Leeds chamber of commerce predicts that a quarter of Leeds firms will make people redundant in the next three months? What action does his Department intend to take to reverse the elimination of the manufacturing base of Leeds? In particular, I ask the Minister to reopen the only jobcentre in west Leeds. That jobcentre is desperately needed, but it was closed last year by his Department.

Mr. Jackson: We have already had some discussion on the implications of the recession and I have given advice about how unemployment could be kept down, at a time when economic activity is inevitably falling back, by looking more carefully at wage settlements. The hon. Gentleman asked about jobcentres in his constituency. There is, of course, the proposed Horsforth jobcentre and I shall certainly have another look at the jobcentres in his constituency. I know that there has been extensive correspondence about the matter in the past.

Mr. Batiste: Is it not true that if the Government had heeded the Labour party's advice last year to slash the defence industry, not only would our troops in the Gulf be less well-equipped but many manufacturing jobs of the highest quality in Leeds would be lost, including many at the Challenger tank factory?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right. We would have been further embarrassed in the military operations in the Gulf. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) would do well to study the implications of what my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said.

Health and Safety Executive

8. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had about resourcing difficulties with the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Forth: The Government have once again met in full the Health and Safety Commission's request for funds for 1991-92. The commission's chairman, Dr. Cullen, has recently written to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State indicating that the available resources will enable the commission to take forward its programme of work.

Mr. Eastham: Will the Minister consider the serious disasters taking place throughout the country, the extra responsibilities that the Health and Safety Executive is given for North sea oil rigs, rivers and railways and the fact that it reported to the Select Committee on Employment recently that the Treasury is providing inadequate funds with inadequate inflation factors to add to its budget? Will he also consider the important factor reported to the Committee that the Health and Safety Executive is unable to man the appropriate law facilities and is unable to cope with enforcing the law?

Mr. Forth: I must confess that my reading of the evidence given to the Select Committee on Employment does not coincide with that of the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps we should both re-study the record to see what was said. As I said in my original reply, the chairman of the commission has said that he believes that the resources are adequate for the great responsibilities of the commission and the executive. Our record on health and safety bears that out. It is a record of which we are proud and it is one of the best in the European Community. Of course, we always look at any case that is made for additional resources. We have said that the transfer of responsibilities after the Cullen report will not cause a lack of resources. I cannot square the record or Dr. Cullen's evidence with what the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Mr. Burns: So that there is no misunderstanding on this important issue, will my hon. Friend confirm that his Department has met in full for the next financial year the Health and Safety Commission's request for funding?

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend is correct and I am grateful to him for emphasising that point. I cannot stress enough the high regard that we have for the work of the commission and the executive and the great lengths to which we go to ensure that they have the resources that they require and for which they ask. I hope that that will continue.

Factory Inspections

9. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of factories and other places of work which have not been inspected by factory inspectors for three, five, seven, nine and 11 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: As the reply contains detailed statistics I shall, with permission, arrange for it to be printed in the *Official Report*.

The figures include many premises that have a low inspection rating based on inspectors' judgment of risks, site standards and management control. In addition, these premises also include those that have been visited for other purposes such as the investigation of an accident or complaint.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that the level of fatalities and accidents in British industry is still far too high? He said in answer to an earlier question that it is important to make workers and employers conscious of the problems of safety at work and that one of the best ways of ensuring that is to have regular inspections.

Mr. Forth: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman is correct. We share the view that accident levels are always too high. The number of health and safety inspectors has increased in the past year or two and a carefully planned series of visits and inspections is carried out by the Health and Safety Executive. Work is continuing, and will always continue, to find more and better ways of ensuring that awareness of

safety requirements in the workplace is improved and that our health and safety record, which is already very good by international camparison, continues to improve. That is our aim.

Following is the information:

There are 493,035 fixed premises registered with the Health and Safety Executive's factory inspectorate (FI). The following table shows the number of fixed premises registered with FI and recorded as not having received a planned inspection within the last three, five, seven, nine and eleven years:

Number of years since last inspected	*Number of premises not inspected*
3	247,713
5	187,971
7	158,980
9	95,606
11	69,564

Labour Statistics

10. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of unemployment in the United Kingdom; and what are the comparable figures for all the other European Community states.

Mr. Howard: The United Kingdom has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Community and the United Kingdom rate is well below the European average. Unemployment is higher in Spain, Ireland, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Greece. With permission, I shall publish the detailed figures in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that typically helpful and detailed reply. Does he agree that it enables us to put the United Kingdom's unemployment figures into the European perspective? Does he further agree that it strikes a favourable comparison with Europe?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We can put the figures in perspective by remembering that there are now 2 million more people at work than there were when the Government took office in 1979.

Mr. Leighton: Does the Secretary of State recall the letter that he sent me dated 15 January, in which he said that between 1979 and 1988 employment in the United Kingdom increased by 1·9 per cent., whereas in the European Community it increased by 3·5 per cent.—virtually double the increase in this country? He should not be complacent about unemployment as in the three months to September it rose on average by 17,000. In the three months to January it rose by 57,000—an increase of 300 per cent.—and more than 200,000 male workers have lost their jobs since March. The CBI now tells us that we are on the verge of an unemployment disaster because of the recession. Should not the right hon. and learned Gentleman think of reducing interest rates to get us out of the recession before there is a huge increase in unemployment?

Mr. Howard: We should never be complacent about unemployment, but the European figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred show that between 1983 and 1988 almost twice as many jobs were created in this country as in the rest of the Community put together. We regret that unemployment is increasing, but more than half those who enter unemployment leave it within three months.

Mr. Favell: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the reasons why our unemployment levels are so favourable, compared with other EEC countries, is that our labour relations are much more flexible than most of theirs, including Germany? Is not the quickest way of achieving that awful word "convergence" to adopt the social charter?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. The number of disputes in this country is the lowest for 60 years, which is a tribute to the Government's employment legislation. The surest way of worsening our employment record would be to introduce legislation increasing the number of strikes, as proposed by the Labour party.

Mr. Blair: With unemployment rising in every region of the country, every sector of industry and every occupation, what pride does the Secretary of State take in presiding over this unique combination—the fastest rising unemployment of any major industrial country, acute skill shortages and proposed cuts in the Department's budget for training the unemployed?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that we are providing the widest ever range of help to the unemployed to help them get back to work as quickly as possible. We are providing up to 100,000 extra places in job clubs, and the job interview guarantee scheme and employment training will continue to play an important part in helping the unemployed get back to work quickly.

Following is the information:

Comparisons of unemployment between EC countries

	Standardised unemployment rates[2] seasonally adjusted	
	Per cent. rate	*Latest month*
Spain	15·8	August
Ireland	14·8	November
Italy	9·9	July
France	8·9	October
Belgium	8·2	November
Denmark	(8·2)[2]	November
Greece	(7·4)[1]	April 1987
Netherlands	7·4	September
United Kingdom	6·7	November
Portugal	4·7	August
Luxembourg	(1·7)[2]	November
EC Average	(8·3)[2]	November

Note: For those EC countries for which no OECD standardised rates are available, similar harmonised rates compiled by the Statistical Office of European Communities (EUROSTAT) are shown in brackets. These showed the United Kingdom rate at 6·7 per cent. in November compared with the EC average of 8·3 per cent.

[1] Recent comparable figures are currently not available in Greece, the latest relating to April 1987.

[2] There are no reliable figures available as yet for a unified Germany.

Low Pay

11. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he intends to introduce to eradicate low pay.

Mr. Forth: Pay is a matter for negotiators themselves to determine in the light of their particular circumstances.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Government take positive steps to eradicate low pay by prosecuting employers who illegally pay wages below the minimum rate? Is the Minister aware that in 1989 nearly 5,500 employers were found guilty of this offence, yet only 10 were prosecuted? Is not this a case of double standards? How can the Government get away with a criminal act when nobody else can?

Mr. Forth: Opposition Members seem to have an almost unseemly lust for prosecution. This is all the more odd since the number of prosecutions brought under the present Government is almost exactly the same as that brought under the Labour party when it was last in power —although it must be difficult for Opposition Members to remember that. In this regard, we work by persuasion and on the basis of information—not by dragging people automatically and vindictively through the courts. I am afraid that until Opposition Members understand that, I shall continue to give this answer every time the question is asked.

Mr. Gale: Does my hon. Friend agree that European proposals to eradicate low-paying part-time jobs are much more likely to eradicate the jobs, which are of such value, particularly to working women?

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The truth is that many of the proposals emanating from the European Commission and from the Opposition would have the effect of destroying jobs. As my hon. Friend knows, part of the very proud record of the present Government is the number of jobs provided in the wealth-creating sector over the last two or three years. That is something that we wish to protect and we shall resist any efforts by the Labour party, or anybody else, to destroy jobs.

Dr. Reid: How can the Minister say that he is committed to the eradication of low pay when the mass unemployment created by the present Government is the very means by which low pay is extended throughout the country? Can he imagine workers in a constituency like mine, which, over the next few years, faces an unemployment rate of 40 per cent., having any bargaining power to secure a decent level of pay? Is not the truth that mass unemployment and low pay are two sides of the same Government policy?

Mr. Forth: I can agree with half of what the hon. Gentleman has said. He is absolutely right in his assertion that unemployment is the main cause of poverty. He is quite wrong, however, to suggest that low pay is equally a cause. If we were to intervene arbitrarily to increase the level of pay in this country and beyond, employment would be the main casualty. Perversely, any effort to provide arbitrary levels of income would be likely to increase unemployment even further. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said a moment ago, we have one of the lowest levels of unemployment in the European Community, and we intend to keep it that way.

Retail Prices Index

12. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the administrative arrangements regarding the collection of statistics for the retail prices index.

Mr. Jackson: First, I acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Public Accounts Committee's carefully considered report on the retail prices index. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the important personal role that he played on the PAC when it looked at this issue. In close co-operation with the Central Statistical Office, which has responsibility for the RPI, the employment service is taking action to ensure that the data are comprehensive and accurate by introducing targets for collection offices, tighter management controls over the collection of data, and better guidance for collectors.

Mr. Latham: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and for his full response. Is he aware that nothing could be more important to pensioners than for the retail prices index connection to be given high priority in the work of the Department of Employment? As the permanent secretary to his Department suggested to the Public Accounts Committee that this work could be privatised, does my hon. Friend have anything to say in that regard?

Mr. Jackson: I assure my hon. Friend that we do not believe that any bias arose from deficiencies in the figures. However, we certainly acknowledge the priority of this work for the employment service. The question of how this sort of information is collected is kept under review, and on that point I shall keep in touch with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cryer: While prices are very important to pensioners, are not wages also important? As the Government have boasted about the booming economy, why, when they came to office, did they deliberately destroy the link between pensions and wages? In effect, they have each year robbed every pensioner in this country of hundreds of pounds of rightful income that was provided under Labour.

Mr. Jackson: This is, of course, a matter for the Department of Social Security. I seem to remember that, when it was in government, the Labour party found it difficult to sustain the link.

Tourism

13. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for overseas visitors *(a)* to the United Kingdom and *(b)* to London.

Mr. Jackson: According to the latest available figures, overseas residents made an estimated 15·6 million visits to the United Kingdom during the first 10 months of 1990 and 4·3 million visits to London during the first six months of that year.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures reflect great credit on everyone working in the tourist industry and that they should help to tide it through the uncertain period that lies immediately ahead? Does my hon. Friend accept that once the uncertainties of the Gulf are over and tourists come back to London in large numbers, the number of coaches will multiply? The off-street parking facilities in London are inadequate. Will my hon. Friend talk to his colleagues in the Department of Transport and to the local authorities to see whether that can be remedied?

Mr. Jackson: I am well aware of the problems of coach parking. Primary responsibility lies with the borough

councils, but, as my hon. Friend knows, Transport Ministers are actively considering the issue in conjunction with all the other interests and organisations involved. The working parties are due to report early this year.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware of the strong opinion in the tourist industry in Wales that the way in which the British Tourist Authority markets Britain overseas leads to a preponderance of visitors coming to London and to an inadequate proportion coming to areas such as Wales? Will he discuss with the BTA the representations from the Welsh tourist board for it to have the right to market Wales overseas?

Mr. Jackson: I shall draw that to the attention of my colleague who deals with this matter and to the BTA. As I said in an earlier answer, it is important that we should seek to diversify the range of areas that attract tourists to this country. I go along with the hon. Gentleman on that point.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Cran: Would my right hon. Friend care to take this opportunity to assure foreign business men and tourists —and indeed, almost everyone else who comes to the United Kingdom—that they have been grossly misled into thinking that coming into the United Kingdom is a dangerous occupation? Would he confirm that using British aircraft and British airports is almost as safe as using those anywhere else in the world and that stringent security arrangements are in place? Will he confirm that they will stay in place as long as the threats, to which we are accustomed, continue?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. A great deal of effort has gone into ensuring that our aircraft and all other modes of transport are entirely safe. My hon. Friend is quite right. There is no question of people in this country being intimidated by terrorism. I hope very much that the usual clutch of visitors will come to this country, where they will find the usual warm welcome.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not clear to the right hon. Gentleman that, with unemployment rising, and output and investment falling, his interest rate policies have pushed Britain back into slump? Will he now change those policies before he inflicts further damage on British jobs, on British enterprise and on British competitiveness?

The Prime Minister: I must say to the right hon. Gentleman that the thrust of policy is geared to dealing with the principal economic problem in front of us—the reduction of inflation—so that the economy may again begin to grow. That is the thrust of policy and it will continue to be so.

Mr. Kinnock: Can the Prime Minister tell us how on earth cutting investment combats inflation? Is it not obvious to him that weakening British industry now will weaken the British economy in the future?

The Prime Minister: As the Confederation of British Industry said yesterday in its report, it is encouraging that most employers expect to maintain spending on innovation and to maintain or increase spending on training. The right hon. Gentleman must recognise the substantive point that what really destroys the effectiveness of investment in this country is inflation, when it gets out of hand and when people can see that investment will not yield a proper reward.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that, if British industry is to begin recovery in the course of this year, he must cut interest rates now and find a sensible way of restraining consumption? What is happening now is ruinous.

The Prime Minister: When it is appropriate to reduce interest rates, people do so. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he was urging us to join the exchange rate mechanism when the exchange rate was DM 2·95. We will reduce interest rates when it is appropriate to do so.

Baltic States

Q2. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on the Soviet Union's handling of the Baltic states and their bid for independence.

The Prime Minister: We have made our concern known very clearly to the Soviet authorities, in particular about the actions of Soviet troops in Vilnius and Riga and their tragic consequences. We believe that the Soviet authorities should withdraw their troops and negotiate with the elected authorities in the Baltic states on their aspirations.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of the Soviet Union's oppressive policies in the Baltic states, will my right hon. Friend confirm that one of the factors that will determine future United Kingdom aid will be the Soviet Union's acknowledgement of the Baltic states people's right to self-determination?

The Prime Minister: We have always supported the right of the people of the Baltic states to decide their future status through negotiation with the Soviet Union. That will continue to guide our policy in the future.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Is the Prime Minister aware that President Landsbergis will host a conference entitled "a free Lithuania in Europe" between 7 and 16 February in Vilnius and that, concurrent with that, he will conduct a national poll to establish changes within the constitution of the state of Lithuania? Does the Prime Minister agree that such a conference would be an ideal opportunity for an all-party delegation from the House to visit the Baltic states to see what is happening? Will the Prime Minister consider such a delegation?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her suggestion. That is a matter for hon. Members, not for me.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend make it perfectly plain to the Soviet authorities that aid to the

USSR as a unitary state is conditional on the maintenance of human rights and democratic freedoms within the constituent republics as they now are?

The Prime Minister: I have previously done that, as my hon. Friend will know. I must add that, over the past few years, we have invested a great deal of time and effort, as has the United States, in improving the relationship and atmosphere with the Soviet Union. I hope that we can suspend judgment on some activities until we have further information. What appears to be happening in Vilnius and Riga is quite unacceptable, but I hope that we can suspend judgment until we see matters more clearly. Yet again, we make it clear to the Soviet Union that our support for Mr. Gorbachev is support for him and his reforms, not for repression.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dunnachie: Is the Prime Minister aware that there is total support for his concern for the welfare of British troops in the Gulf? Will he put his money where his mouth is and give councils the money that they need to relieve their troops in the Gulf of the poll tax burden?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated to the House the other day, authority already exists for local authorities to relieve troops during their period there.

Mr. Cormack: Will my right hon. Friend have a word with the chairman of the Post Office this afternoon about the supply of the blue letter forms on which families write to forces in the Gulf? Is he aware that families of the Staffordshire regiment have been complaining that the forms are not readily available in many rural post offices?

The Prime Minister: I can say to my hon. Friend that more have been distributed because of concern about that matter. About 600 sacks of mail are being moved each day to and from the Gulf. It is a massive operation. Hon. Members will have seen on television some of the difficulties that there are in delivering it.

Q4. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Prime Minister spend some time today considering the effects of 13 days of war in the Gulf, the deaths of service people, the massive losses of Iraqi civilians, the environmental destruction throughout the region, and the loss of some civil liberties in this country? Will the right hon. Gentleman accordingly join King Hussein of Jordan and the Pope in calling for a ceasefire in the war to enable the problems of the region to be addressed peacefully, as they will all be there at the end of the fighting?

The Prime Minister: It was not the allies who ensured that the problems of the region could not be solved peacefully; it was Saddam Hussein. It is perfectly clear what needs to be done before they can be addressed peacefully.

Q5. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: Will my right hon.Friend confirm that the coalition forces in the Gulf are striving to uphold the United Nations resolutions and that it is hoped, therefore, that as many members of the United Nations as possible will contribute towards this effort? Does he agree that there is every indication at the present time that this will happen, and that it is to be hoped that our friends and allies, particularly those that have not sent forces to the Gulf, will recognise their responsibilities and find ways of contributing to the war effort?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. A number of Governments have already made financial contributions towards the cost of the forces in the Gulf and a number of others have announced their intention to do so. I understand that Germany has made such an announcement just today. We are grateful for that and we will be in touch with the Governments concerned.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister confirm that the objective of the coalition forces in the Gulf remains to secure the liberation, peace and stability of Kuwait and does not extend to the occupation and dismemberment of a defeated Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to confirm our war aims to the right hon. Gentleman. We have made them clear consistently. They are those set out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. They have been and remain the aims of the allies.

North Yorkshire

Q6. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to North Yorkshire.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and very much hope to include North Yorkshire among them.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend encourage those banks and building societies that are offering mortgages to home owners in North Yorkshire to extend the facility to European currency unit mortgages, thereby reducing the interest rate by some 3 per cent?

The Prime Minister: Banks and building societies have the capacity to do that at present. It is a matter for their judgment whether they do so and for their mortgage borrowers whether they seek such a facility.

Mr. O'Brien: In the course of his visit to North Yorkshire, will the Prime Minister take note of the importance of the link from the A1 servicing North Yorkshire to the M1 to ease the congestion of traffic on the A642 through Oulton and Rothwell?

The Prime Minister: I will do better than that; I will tell my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Dickens: Prime Minister, are you aware—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Are you aware——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have sympathy for the hon. Member. Give him a fair hearing.

Mr. Dickens: Prime Minister, are you aware——

Mr. Speaker: Why not proceed with the question? I think we have got the first bit.

Mr. Dickens: Is the Prime Minister aware that my eldest son, Clive, signed on for the Gulf last week, and this week——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Did he do it in Yorkshire, that is the point?

Mr. Dickens: Is this not more commendable than the behaviour of a lot of yellow-bellied Labour MPs?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman absolutely spoiled a good opportunity.

Engagements

Q7. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: When the Prime Minister is travelling around North Yorkshire, will he pay a visit to York and take note that the Conservative club is having a closing-down sale because it has gone bankrupt as a result of the Government's business rate having increased from £5,000 to £15,000? Is it a Government policy to achieve a classless society by closing down Tory clubs in marginal seats? However, every cloud has a silver lining. When Labour comes into power we shall abolish the poll tax and there will be jobs in York, Derbyshire and everywhere else in Britain.

The Prime Minister: But not, I think, for most people working today, for they will have long since retired.

Q8. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 29 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Holt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this year the Northern regional health authority is receiving the largest sum that it has ever had? That is welcome news in the north of England. The 10·2 per cent. increase over last year means that the people of the north of England are getting a marvellous deal from the Government. In particular there will be the opportunity for increased capital investment in a new hospital in my constituency for which we have waited for over 10 years.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to hear that. I am always pleased when my hon. Friend is pleased. He is a doughty fighter for the north and has been for many years.

Ms. Abbott: Will the Prime Minister confirm that there is nothing explicit in the appropriate United Nations resolutions that authorises an allied invasion of Iraq? Does he accept that although there is a widespread consensus in the House and internationally that Saddam Hussein must leave Kuwait, there is no such consensus for an allied invasion of Iraq to smash its military machine, with all the casualties and damage to Iraq's people and infrastructure that would result?

The Prime Minister: Resolution 678 authorises all necessary means to implement the objective of freeing Kuwait and restoring peace and security to the area. At this stage it is impossible to determine in detail precisely what that may mean. We shall need to judge that in the light of circumstances and we shall judge our actions against the security council resolutions.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether you have had a request from the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement about possible cuts in fire service provision which are the subject of an enormous lobby today by firemen and women worried about the cuts imposed by the Government on fire services?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such request.

Abolition of Warrant Sales (Scotland)

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to a point of order which might interest you on the ten-minute Bill which is about to be presented to the House by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan)? I am sure that the matter can be explained. The hon. Gentleman wishes to have leave to bring in a Bill which will abolish warrant sales in Scotland. In the hypothetical case——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot deal with hypothetical points of order. What is the point of order on a matter of fact?

Mr. King: It is a matter of fact that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West is on record as saying that he has not paid his community charge. My point of order is that, in June 1858, in column 209 of *Hansard*, a resolution was agreed as follows:

"it is contrary to the usage and derogatory to the dignitary of this House, that any of its Members should bring forward, promote or advocate in this House, any proceeding or measure in which he may have acted or been concerned, for or in consideration of any pecuniary fee or reward."

It is absolutely true that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West is not presenting the Bill for any financial reward; one understands that. The point that I wish to make to you, Mr. Speaker, is that, in promoting the Bill, the hon. Member will be rewarded, if it goes through, by not having to pay community charge or perhaps not having goods seized from him in payment of that community charge. In 1858, the matter concerned members of the legal profession, but during that debate it was determined as applicable in a wider area. The resolution refers to "any Member" of the House, whether a member of the legal profession or not. It is therefore a point that you might care to consider, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have in fact considered it. I am afraid that the hon. Member is not on to a particularly good point. There is no question of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) being paid for asking leave to bring in his Bill. That was what the resolution in 1858 was all about. If hon. Members could not advocate general changes in the law from which they would benefit themselves, it would never be possible to reduce taxation. I am sure that is not what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) wants. Therefore, the motion in the name of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West is fully in order.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing further to that point of order. I call the hon. Member for Falkirk, West to move the motion, which I think will be opposed.

3.35 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no truth either in the rumour that I am sponsored by the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers.

I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish the practice of warrant sales and to replace it with a Debt Arbitration Service; and to control the employment and conduct of sheriff officers.

This is my third attempt to introduce such a measure. The last time, I managed to get cross-party support; indeed, on checking *Hansard*, I note that the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) was one of the sponsors of the Bill which I tried to introduce along these lines. I therefore expect him to vote with me, if there is a vote, and to encourage all his hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches to do likewise.

At the outset I should like to pay tribute to the late Jimmy Dempsey, the former Member for Coatbridge and Airdrie who campaigned for many years for the abolition of warrant sales. I should also like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), who last year introduced a similar Bill. I was pleased to be one of her sponsors.

The practice of warrant sales in Scotland dates back to the middle ages. Since that time, they have caused untold hardship and misery to many people and their families. Indeed, people have sometimes been driven literally to suicide when faced with the threat of a warrant sale. At the moment, many families in Scotland are living in fear of a knock on the door from the sheriff officer coming to threaten or actually sell their belongings because the family has fallen into debt, often through no fault of its own.

Warrant sales have rightly been described as a barbaric form of humiliation and blackmail which ought to have been outlawed years ago. They are not even an efficient system of debt collection, because the expenses incurred through the warrant sale system are often out of all proportion to the amount of the original debt, and only about 3 per cent. of warrant sales are successful in the sense of recovering the total debt incurred. People's possessions are often sold at a fraction of their real value, with the result that the debtor loses the lot, the creditor gains little but the sheriff officer and unscrupulous salesmen line their pockets.

Recent legislation has extended the number of articles exempt from warrant sales to many essential household items and articles of furniture. Hon. Members may welcome those exemptions, but they go only part of the way. What is required is complete abolition, and that is what my Bill proposes.

My Bill also proposes to replace the warrant sales system with a debt arbitration service, which would facilitate arrangements between creditor and debtor so that a debt that is not disputed can be repaid by instalments, taking into account the debtor's financial circumstances.

My Bill would also control the conduct of sheriff officers by making them employees of the courts, and therefore more accountable. Under the existing system, they appear to behave like free enterprise agents; firms of sheriff officers have connections with private debt collecting agencies. That should be outlawed.

Sometimes, sheriff officers behave almost like Gestapo officers, breaking into people's houses, bullying residents, subjecting them to fear and intimidation and threatening to sell off their furniture and other miserable possessions. My Bill would stop such legalised intimidation.

Since the advent of the poll tax, the case for the introduction of my Bill has been reinforced. Recent figures produced by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities show that, during the current financial year, more than 50 per cent. of Scottish poll tax has not yet been collected.

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

During the past financial year, 1989-90, 1,208,000 summary warrants were issued for non-payment of the poll tax.

After 20 months of the existence of the poll tax in Scotland, warrant officers have made 15,000 attempts to poind property. Only 1,000 poindings have taken place and, as far as I know, there has not been a single warrant sale in Scotland for non-payment of the poll tax. That is not due to sheriff officers' good nature but to the strength of some local authorities and to the massive resistance of the anti-poll tax campaign.

Let us be straight about this: most people who are in poll tax arrears simply cannot afford to pay the poll tax, but they have been joined by many who can pay and who have chosen to make a stand so that those who cannot pay are not isolated and thereby become easy victims for sheriff officers.

I do not expect every hon. Member to agree with that stance, which is the one that I have taken. I have made it clear that, if Conservative Members want me to pay my poll tax, the sooner the Government abolish it the better. I am on record as saying, in the House and elsewhere, that as soon as the Government announce the abolition of the poll tax I shall gladly pay every penny of my arrears. I am not attempting to get any free ride.

Whether people agree with my stance or not, it is fairly self-evident that the more people who refuse to pay, the more difficult it will be for the 200 sheriff officers to target, hound and harass the poor people who have no choice because they cannot afford to pay. It is also self-evident that the more people there are who refuse to pay, the sooner the poll tax will be abolished.

If everyone had stumped up every single penny of their poll tax, the former Prime Minister would still be at No. 10 Downing street and the poll tax would not be under threat. However, largely because of the anti-poll tax campaign, the Government have been pushed into undertaking some form of review.

I warn the Government that the anti-poll tax campaign, including non-payment, will continue until the tax is completely abolished. If the Government have any sensitivity at all to the feelings of the people of Scotland and of the rest of Britain, they will introduce their own legislation to abolish the poll tax and warrant sales. Unfortunately, there is no immediate sign of the Government doing that, so I ask the House to support my Bill.

3.45 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I know that behind this Bill lie humane notions of helping people in financial difficulty, but I have more than a suspicion that its real motive is to excuse people who have not paid their poll tax from their respnsibilities and obligations under the law. It may be that some non-payers are in financial difficulty, but that cannot be said of the hon. Member for Falkirk, East, because, although he can patently afford to pay his poll tax, he decided not to do so.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have not heard anything out of order.

Mr. Ewing: I am surprised that you, Mr. Speaker, did not hear anything out of order, because the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), made reference to "the hon. Member for Falkirk, East",
but I am sitting here quiet as a kirk moose.

Mr. Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing). I trust that the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) will correct himself.

Mr. Oppenheim: I apologise to both you, Mr. Speaker, and the hon. Member for Falkirk, East for my mistake.

I was making the point that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan)——

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear the hon. Member mentioned, but what is his point of order?

Mr. Sillars: Can you, Mr. Speaker, intervene in the speech of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), because he knows no more about Scottish geography than he does about the Scottish law of diligence?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Amber Valley was in order in the remarks that he was making.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Member for Falkirk, West, can well afford to pay his poll tax, but chose not to—and by introducing his Bill, he seeks to absolve himself from the consequences of his actions. The hon. Gentleman is always among the first to criticise those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who fail to declare their interests, yet he has signally failed to declare his own interest in the Bill, which, if enacted, could result in considerable financial benefit to himself.

The interests declared by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West in the Register of Members' Interests include occasional fees for broadcasting and writing, sponsorship by the Confederation of Health Service Employees, and a trip to the Gulf in September 1990 as a member of the international peace mission. However, there is nothing about the hon. Gentleman's interest in the Bill or in poll tax avoidance.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must come to the protection of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). I have already told the House that he is in order in introducing his Bill.

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept that, Mr. Speaker, but I had expected at the very least that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is not known for his reticence in impugning others for their lack of propriety, would jump to his feet to urge the hon. Member for Falkirk, West to declare some interest in his own Bill, even if he is not strictly obliged to do so by the conventions of the House. Perhaps I expected too much. After all, the hon. Member for Bolsover also has an interest in the Bill, as a non-payer of the poll tax himself.

Talking of Derbyshire Members of Parliament, of the four Opposition Members who represent Derbyshire constituencies, no fewer than three have failed to pay their fair share to their counties' local government costs for this year.

Perhaps hon. Members who have brought the Bill forward feel that in some strange way they are striking a

blow for working-class dignity, but that is not the way that they are perceived by most people. When the vast majority of people who have paid their poll tax—often, I accept, with some difficulty—see the likes of the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who is a millionaire many times over, refusing to pay his poll tax, they are rightly resentful.

They are all the more resentful when it is the very same hon. Members who are at the forefront of demands for more money for local government, who constantly demand improvements in public services and are the first to leap to the defence of any item of profligate spending by their county councils, who now refuse to make their fair and legitimate contribution to local government costs. They are always the first to make excuses for any excessive local government spending, but when it comes to stumping up for the bill, they are always the last in the queue.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. According to the Order Paper, as I understand it, the Bill is connected with the abolition of warrant sales in Scotland and does not relate to the poll tax. I ask you to consider whether it is in order to misrepresent the Bill in this way, when 99 per cent. of warrant sales, poindings and everything else relating to the law of diligence in Scotland relates not to the poll tax but to other matters of debt? Is it in order for the hon. Member to misrepresent the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) did mention the question of warrant sales in respect of the poll tax, in the latter part of his speech and therefore it is in order for the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) to do the same. However, I remind the hon. Member for Amber Valley that the Bill concerns warrant sales and not the application of this procedure in England.

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand that, Mr. Speaker, and I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion.

People are especially resentful when Opposition Members fail to pay their fair share towards local government costs. They know that, in doing so, they are increasing the burden upon the rest of the population who, for the most part, are paying their fair share.

I find it extraordinary that anyone who aspires to be a law maker can urge people to break the law, and even more extraordinary that he should then seek to legislate to absolve himself and others from the consequences of such law breaking. That a party which aspires to government should have so many law breakers in its ranks is bad enough, but that they should also be tolerated by the Leader of the Opposition in such a spineless way shows that their party is still far from fit to hold office.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 156, Noes, 109.

Division No. 49] **[3.53 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Dave Nellist.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Bright, Graham

Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thorne, Neil
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wilshire, David
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Devlin and
Mr. Robin Squire.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Harry Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mr. Michael J. Martin, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Gordon McMaster and Mr. David Marshall.

ABOLITION OF WARRANT SALES (SCOTLAND) BILL

Mr. Dennis Canavan accordingly presented a Bill to abolish the practice of warrant sales and to replace it with a Debt Arbitration Service; and to control the employment and conduct of sheriff officers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 69].

Local Government Finance (England)

4.4 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move,

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1991-92 (House of Commons Paper No. 93), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the next four motions on the Order Paper:

That the Population Report (England) (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 94), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 95), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 96), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1989-90 (House of Commons Paper No. 12), a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

Divisions will take place at 10 o'clock.

Mr. Heseltine: The House will expect me to say something about the progress of the review of local government structure and finance that I announced on 5 December. As I have said, the review will be a thorough one. I wish to consult widely. I have already had a constructive meeting with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and I have agreed to meet him again. I have met the leaders of the local authority associations, and I shall meet them again next week. I have met individual local authority leaders from all parties and I have an extensive programme of further meetings. I have also arranged to attend a meeting between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas). My hon. Friends the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State are also consulting widely.

I repeat my invitation to the parliamentary Labour party. It seems curious that the Labour party is co-operating in my review at every level, with the exception of the party leadership.

Depending on the progress of our discussions, I hope to give a first indication of our thinking in the spring. By the nature of the review, anything that I can say then will be unlikely to deal with all the issues that must be addressed, but it may make sense to focus the national debate—to rule some things out and some things in.

I have already announced to the House changes that will have major practical implications for the incidence of the community charge. The community charge reduction scheme will provide £1·7 billion of help to more than half of all charge payers next year. Together with the settlement that we are discussing today and the community charge reduction scheme, I believe that local authorities will have it in their power to hold bills actually paid by charge payers to below £300 on average.

The help will be particularly directed at those couples and single people who experienced the largest increases in their bills last year. Virtually all those who previously had rates bills below three quarters of the average for their areas will benefit.

The House will wish me also to address the issue of the community charge as it affects our service men serving in the Gulf.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Before my right hon. Friend leaves his first point, there is a certain amount of lack of information. What about people who had no rates bills at all because they were not householders and who now get community charge bills?

Mr. Heseltine: If such people are disabled or elderly, they are entitled to special assistance, which is part of already established regimes with which the House will be familiar.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What about the others?

Mr. Heseltine: That is the answer to the question. The schemes that exist have already been fully explained to the House. If no scheme relates specifically to them, they are liable to the charges. One of the purposes behind the introduction of the community charge was to bring into its incidence all the adults in the community. Therefore, it follows that people who did not qualify as home owners before the community charge was introduced would be likely to come within its incidence afterwards. That was one of the necessary purposes.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Secretary of State point out by example what he meant by help relating to disability? There is no such help. It is based only on income. That is not the answer to the question posed by his hon. Friend for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop).

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. Disabled people qualify for the transitional relief scheme and for the new community charge reduction scheme. *[Interruption.]* I have done my best to answer the question.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: We have had two specific questions, to which I have given an answer. There is a great deal of detail to deal with in this speech and I intend to make some progress. I intend to deal with the important issue of the affect of the community charge on our service men in the Gulf.

On 5 November, we advised local authorities that, where a service man is posted until further notice outside Great Britain, community charge registration officers should use their discretion to assume that his liability for the personal community charge ceases from the date of posting. There are arrangements for service liaison officers to inform community charge registration officers of postings to enable this arrangement to work efficiently. The spouse of any service man who is posted will continue to be liable to the personal charge where she remains resident in this country. We have advised authorities that, where a service man has an outstanding community charge liability at the date when he is posted, no action should be taken to recover the amount due until the service man's return.

Mr. Julian Critchley (Aldershot): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in Rushmoor, which covers Aldershot and Farnborough, the register has dropped by more than 2,000 because of the number of service men going to the Gulf. Were the revenue support grant to remain the same as last September, most of my constituents would be paying £14 a year more in poll tax. Is he able to help with that?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting that question to me. I have considered the effect of service men leaving their local authority areas to serve in the Gulf. Most local authorities would be able to absorb the problem within the normal flow of population which effects all such movements of people from one year to the other. That deals with the problems of most authorities when service men move overseas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) is seeing my hon. Friend the Minister for local Government and Inner Cities tomorrow about the particular consequences for his constituency and his local authority, given that many service men are involved. We have no specific proposals, but we should like to listen to what my hon. Friend has to say. If it seems that there is a substantial problem, we may consider it in the light of the consultation.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): What happens—God forbid, all of us hope that this does not happen—if a service man who is exempted from the point of departure from these shores does not return? Will their spouses, because of joint and several liability and as has happened with families of trawlermen under Scottish legislation, be levied with a tax for which that service man was liable before leaving these shores? Yesterday, *The Guardian* and *The Times* reported that the Department is considering abolishing court hearings for non-payers. That will mean that service men's widows, instead of being prosecuted by councils, will have to initiate proceedings to prove their innocence, unless the right hon. Gentleman says that those service men will be totally exempt.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises a hypothetical circumstance which is within the discretion of CCROs. We hope that those circumstances will not arise, but I have explored them and will consider them further if necessary. The existing arrangements are adequate to cope with such a——

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: No. The House understands that these matters provide for endless intervention, and one makes no progress with one's speech. Many of the questions that will occur to hon. Members will be covered by my remarks.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made it clear in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on 18 October that no service man was to be financially worse off as a result of service in the Gulf. I can confirm that that assurance applies to auxiliaries and territorials who are posted outside Great Britain and become liable to the standard community charge as a result. That arrangement already applies to regulars. The Ministry of Defence will pay to such people compensation equal to any excess of their standard charge liability over the personal community charge which they had been paying before posting.

I should like to say a word about the apparent anomaly that has emerged in the different treatment of single and married service men for community charge purposes. Under Queen's Regulations, a single soldier who has been

[Mr. Heseltine]

living in barracks is deemed to have lost any right to return to that accommodation after an absence of 61 days. Our advice to local authorities is that, if the service man returns within that period, he is liable for the personal charge during his absence, whereas, if he returns after 61 days, he should be treated as having had his sole or main residence elsewhere during that period and should not be liable for the personal charge at the address.

However, personnel living in married quarters or in their own homes are assumed not to have changed their sole or main residence until they have been absent for six months—by analogy with the practice adopted by CCROs in respect of other groups, such as merchant seamen. So it is possible for two people—one single, and one married—to be posted to the Gulf, for both to return after, say, 62 days, and for the single person to have no personal community charge liability for that period even if he returns to the same barracks, whereas the married soldier is liable for the whole period. This may seem like an anomaly, but, of course, it applies to any posting outside Great Britain, not just postings to the Gulf.

Also, there is some analogy with the position under the rating system. The single soldier posted outside Great Britain would have ceased to have liability for the rating element of his accommodation charge, whereas the married soldier would have remained liable for a rating charge in respect of his family home. So I do not think that this is the anomaly that it may at first appear to be.

The House will appreciate that the last time we issued local authorities with guidance on the treatment of service personnel was early in November, and that events since then have moved on. There have come to light new cases that were not wholly covered by our guidance. We therefore plan to issue to authorities fresh guidance building on the advice that we have already given them. I shall put details before the House at the earliest opportunity.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has today written to me suggesting that we should go further, and introduce legislation exempting from the community charge all service men in the Gulf. I am not convinced that this is necessary. I believe that, if community charge registration officers use their discretion in the way we have advised, service men will be treated equitably. If, however, there emerge problems that can be dealt with only by legislation, I shall come back to the House as soon as I can.

At this time of the year, is is customary to hear of cuts—often of horrendous proportions—in local government services. Indeed, one could be forgiven for believing that the 1980s in some way saw the decimation of what local government was asked to provide.

It may help hon. Members if I remind them of the simple facts.

When the Conservative Government were elected in 1979, local authority manpower—at nearly 2 million full-time equivalents—was at an all-time high. In the following two years, we managed to persuade authorities to look more critically at their manpower requirements. This resulted in a welcome reduction of 80,000 employees, But the encouraging trend was short-lived. Local authority manpower has steadily increased and, on a comparable basis, is now back to virtually the level of 1979. Local authority total revenue expenditure increased from £43 billion, at 1990 prices, in 1979-80 to £51 billion in 1990-91—a 17 per cent. real-terms increase.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): In view of the larger numbers of socialist councils, my right hon. Friend should not be surprised at what has happened to manpower figures. Is he aware, for example, that in Hertfordshire, where, between 1985 and 1989, the county council had a Labour and Liberal majority, the number of employees increased by 5,000 and that spending was at a level £40 million above the rate of inflation?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend brings a sad example to our attention. However, the situation is even worse than he suggests. When one looks at the situation in the country at large one finds that Conservative authorities are much more careful about the interests of their charge payers, and that they consistently levy lower charges.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Taking into account the legislation that the Government have imposed on local authorities, is it any wonder that there should have been manpower increases? Consider, for example, the hundreds of people who, in my area, as in every other, have had to be employed to collect the infamous poll tax.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman must be fully aware that the increases had been going on long before the community charge was introduced. I am grateful to hear him talking about increases in manpower. I am not sure how he squares that with the language about cuts that we continually hear from the Labour party. The whole essence of what I am trying to say to the House is that manpower is broadly where it was, at the highest level ever, in 1979, but that the real expenditure of local government is 17 per cent. higher than it was at the beginning of the decade. Spending across almost all services has increased significantly.

Two examples illustrate my point. In 1981-82, spending on the police amounted to £1·9 billion. In 1989-90, it amounted to £3·8 billion, which is an increase in real terms of 30·3 per cent. Similarly, in 1981-82, spending on personal social services amounted to £1·8 billion, increasing in real terms by 30·1 per cent. to £3·6 billion in 1989-90. The reality is that there has been a consistent real-term increase in local authority expenditure throughout the 1980s.

The settlement announced on 31 October is realistic by any standards. It provides for an increase in total standard spending—that is, the amount that it would be appropriate for local authorities in aggregate to spend—of 19 per cent. to £39 billion. When viewed in isolation, that is a considerable increase. When set in the context of the substantial growth in local government spending over the past decade, it gives the lie to the suggestion that local government is being forced to make damaging cuts—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It is interesting that, despite all the figures, the Labour party goes on talking about that.

I have a copy here of a publication of the National and Local Government Officers Association called *Public Service*. It is interesting because it examines the various authorities that were capped last year. The House will be fully aware of all that was said about the consequences to public services if the capping legislation was enforced and if the cuts were brought about. The newspaper has done

the admirable service for all of us of surveying what happened in some of the capped authorities so that we can see what the horrendous consequences, about which the Labour party talked, were in practice.

Let me give an example. Rochdale's budget was cut by £8 million, but there were no compulsory redundancies. Bristol's budget was cut by £7·6 million, but there were no redundancies, no cuts in services and no charge increases, and almost £5 million was saved on financial adjustments. The rest was due to cuts in committees. I do not intend to go further.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No.

This newspaper, admirable as it is in this one rather narrow respect, is available freely for hon. Members to study. There is a difference between what is said in advance about cuts and what happens in practice.

Even in the face of the level of provision about which I have been talking, there is still some complaint that we have not "provided for inflation". That reflects an attitude in certain quarters that inflation is an automatic factor which has to be built into the public expenditure profile, and which must be provided for and perhaps even nurtured.

The realistic point is that inflation must be tackled vigorously if we are to get it down. The clear implication is that, while central Government, industry and every householder have to tighten their belts, local government can be expected to ride on as if there had been no change in its economic fortunes. The logical extension of that argument—that the taxpayers, the business rate payers and the charge payers should fund the high-spending aspirations of the town hall—is set on one side as if there were no logical connection. I regard that as unacceptable.

Mr. Illsley: Utter rubbish.

Mr. Heseltine: It is not utter rubbish; it is far worse than that.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I have been trying to follow what the Secretary of State is saying, but I find it somewhat confusing. Is it not the case that, if an increase in central Government grant or an increase in permitted expenditure is lower than the prevailing rate of inflation, the real effect is a cut? Is not that the inevitable consequence of the right hon. Gentleman's settlement, and is not that the very point that has been made by the Opposition and by local authorities?

Mr. Heseltine: I am coming, helpfully, to the Audit Commission's view on the question that has been put to me by Opposition Members. Some people suggest that local authority budgets have been cut to the bone and that therefore, if we do not provide 100 per cent. of the inflationary increases, as the hon. Gentleman asked, we shall impose further cuts. That is to confuse cash spent with the quality of service delivered, without any attempt to get value for money.

Since 1982, the Audit Commission has systematically worked its way through many of the services of local government. It has discovered that there is scope for £1·3 billion of value-for-money improvements. Opposition Members would call that a cut. We say that it is expenditure that should long since have been rooted out and avoided. That £1·3 billion, only half of which has so far been delivered in economies, was related to only 40 per cent. of local authority expenditure. Quite obviously, there are opportunities for value-for-money reductions without a reduction in service. Those opportunities have been drawn to the attention of local government and of charge payers, formerly ratepayers, by the Audit Commission.

What do we hear from Labour Members? They want to get rid of the Audit Commission. That body, which is systematically improving the quality of services by advice to local government, with all the benefit that flows to the local people concerned because they get better services at lower or the same cost, is to be stopped from pursuing that correct interest in taxpayers' money.

Mr. Gould: I am sorry to ask the Secretary of State to allow me to intervene again, but he really cannot get away with that total misstatement of Labour's position. We have made it clear that the audit function of the Audit Commission should be retained and strengthened. It should be placed in the context in which not just the accountants' narrow view of cost cutting prevails, and it should also be placed in the context of value for money and the quality delivery of services. That is the difference between the right hon. Gentleman's side of the argument and ours.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman simply does not understand. We have auditors whose interest is to establish the rectitude of the accounts and whether the books add up. That is an important form of auditing. As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is keen on that. That is retained. What about the pursuit of value for money, comparative statistics, and quality of service? That is another essential feature of the Audit Commission's activities. The Labour party has defined the function of the Audit Commission as it now exists.

Of course, Labour Members are not prepared to have comparative statistics. They are not prepared for somebody else to monitor the value that is delivered by local government. Why? It is because they know perfectly well that the authorities over which they preside cannot stand the scrutiny of any outside organisation. That is a classic example of the Labour party softening the climate of public expenditure without anyone having regard to the detail that matters.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way to an hon. Member on his side of the House. Does he agree that the matter is worse than he has so far stated? Not only is there a highly suspect question mark over the future of the Audit Commission, but compulsory tendering has been thrown into the balance by the Labour party. We are talking of £3 billion-worth of local government contracts every year, and an estimated 20 per cent. savings—all to the benefit of community charge payers—which have been thrown out the window by the Labour party.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend says that the matter is worse than I have put it. He may be right. I am known for the moderation with which I describe the vagaries of the Labour party.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) has greatly reinforced the point that I wanted to make. If time permitted, I would deal with the benefits of compulsory tendering.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I shall not give way, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. We must make progress.

Parliament has given me powers to cap authorities whose budgets are excessive, or which increase their budgets excessively from year to year. I shall use those powers if it proves necessary. Whether or not it will be necessary is in authorities' own hands. None of them should doubt our determination to ensure that they do not spend more than the nation can afford.

The criteria that we intend to use for next year were set out clearly on 31 October, and I reaffirm them now. Let me also explain the process in more detail, because there has been some misunderstanding about it and I would not be suprised if some hon. Members——

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: Perhaps I could make the point before we explore it.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends are particularly interested in the way the capping machinery works. We have published the intended criteria for deciding whether a precept or demand on the collection fund is excessive, or has increased excessively between this year and next. It is now for authorities to fix their budgets in that knowledge. When they have done so, I must consider those budgets and make my legal decisions on the criteria to be used. That will determine which authorities are capped.

At the same time, I shall propose the numerical level of the cap for each authority in the light of the information I have about their individual circumstances. The capped authorities then have 28 days within which to accept my proposed level of cap or to suggest an alternative level. Only thereafter, if an authority has not accepted my proposed level of cap, do I bring forward to the House an order finally fixing the level of its cap.

These arrangements apply to all authorities, including the single-service police, and fire and civil defence, authorities, which have expressed a number of concerns to me. I believe that the intended criteria are fair and reasonable for all authorities, but if an authority has budgeted in excess of the criteria I adopt, I must in proposing and fixing the level of its cap take its particular circumstances into account.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Would this capping apply to the Wimbledon commoners, who have increased their community charge by about 300 or 400 per cent. from last year?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend knows that there is a £15 million cut-off, and that authorities below that point are not brought within the capping regime—for which the House is profoundly grateful. Certainly my hon. Friends are profoundly grateful that we have only a limited number of authorities with which to deal.

Mr. Winnick: Is the right hon. Gentleman not in fact dealing with the main complaint that we hear, which he dealt with when he was on the Back Benches—that the basic system of the poll tax is unfair and will not be accepted by the overwhelming majority of the people? Those people take precisely the point about the poll tax that he made in speech after speech in denouncing it. Why, as Secretary of State, does he keep it going?

Mr. Heseltine: I generously gave way to the hon. Member hoping that he wished to make a constructive point on the matter that I was discussing, but it was a more general point, which he will doubtless explore, Mr. Speaker, if you are good enough to let him catch your eye.

Turning to the standard spending assessments, it is of course essential that we use the most equitable formulae for dividing the resources available, although it does not automatically follow that we are all agreed. We looked once more at the methodology used for calculating SSAs, and our conclusion was that, by and large, it was fair and appropriate. Nevertheless, after listening carefully to what authorities and their associations had to say—and their advice was often conflicting—we accepted that some improvements were necessary, and these were detailed in the consultation paper. In some instances, there have been changes in the provisional SSAs published at the time of consultation compared with those which are now final, owing to the incorporation of new information.

It is worth reiterating at this stage that an authority's SSA is specific to it—a point which is often misunderstood. SSAs represent our view of the amount of revenue expenditure which it would be appropriate for an authority to incur to provide a standard level of service. They take account of each authority's social, demographic and geographical characteristics and the functions for which it is responsible. They are calculated by applying the same formula to various indicators which reflect the particular characteristics of each authority.

Thus, although two neighbouring authorities may be of the same size and have the same population, differences in such matters as pupil numbers, population densities or road lengths will cause SSAs to differ. But the important point is that SSAs are calculated evenhandedly for each authority, taking full account of the particular characteristics of its area.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My local authority of Lancaster feels strongly that the all-ages social index militates harshly against it compared with places such as Blackburn, Burnley or Preston. We are a very economical council but we are made to appear extravagant because our standard spending assessment is so much affected by various considerations such as the all-ages social index.

Mr. Heseltine: I fully understand my hon. Friend's point, but it means that the needs indicators chosen for distribution of the SSAs showed greater requirements in the other authorities to which she referred. It is not within our gift to do anything but follow the statistics upon which the calculations are made. It is essential that these matters are dealt with on a formula basis. Ministers do not have any discretion once the criteria have been established.

They must follow through the logic of where the criteria take them. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that that is the basis of the legislative framework of the community charge.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Will my right hon. Friend explain why the standard spending assessments have been cut for the metropolitan authorities by £8 million and for the counties by £2 million, whereas those of the London boroughs have been increased by £11 million? Why should the rest of the country pay for London's profligacy?

Mr. Heseltine: Perhaps my hon. Friend has not had time to absorb the full detail of what I am putting to the House. In this settlement, the SSAs are increased by 19·4 per cent. over what we have announced for this year. That is 7 per cent. up on the budget which local authorities set for the current year. Those increases spread right across local authorities. There may be some switch within them as a consequence of judgments that we have reached about the incidence of each SSA and its formulae, but the whole thrust of what has happened is a substantial increase in SSAs across the whole of England.

Perhaps I may now consider the other side of the equation——

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Will the Secretary of State give way, on the north-west?

Mr. Heseltine: We have had one question from the north-west, but I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Evans: Does the Secretary of State accept that anyone who examines local government in the north-west must agree that St. Helens metropolitan district council is probably one of the most efficient councils in the region? Will he explain why St. Helens was the only Merseyside authority to be poll tax-capped last year?

Mr. Heseltine: There is only one answer to that question: it came within the capping criteria. The criteria were set out, the budgets were set and the authority came within the criteria. There is nothing complicated about that. The answer would be exactly the same this year.

Let us move on to the other side of the equation—the funding of all the expenditure involved in financing local government. As the House knows, local authority revenue spending is financed predominantly from three sources: central Government grants, business rates and the community charge. The first two sources, which are referred to collectively as aggregate external finance, are increased this coming year by £3 billion—from £23·1 billion this year to £26·05 billion in 1991-92. That includes £485 million to finance the area protection grant—the new government grant which subsumes the old safety net and the grant to areas of low rateable value. The most significant aspect of this grant, from the charge payers' point of view, is that, from next year, central Government will meet the cost of the safety net.

As we announced in October, we propose that the business rate for next year should be 38·6p in the pound, an increase in line with the rate of inflation. The burden on business will therefore remain broadly the same in real terms as it has been since 1989-90. This stability of the business rate, where business knows from year to year the maximum increase that it can be asked to meet, contrasts markedly with the previous system, whereby business was frequently asked to contribute higher and higher amounts to authorities' growing spending. Locally set poundages rose by an average of 37·4 per cent. more than the rate of inflation between 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in many small market towns, including some in my constituency, shops have had sharp increases in rateable values as a result of revaluation? Will he reconsider the five-year transition period? I believe that he has powers under the legislation to extend it, if necessary.

Mr. Heseltine: The provision is that, at the end of the five years, we can review the transitional position. That is not a commitment one way or the other on what we may decide, but the power to review is built into the system. I hope that helps my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend rightly stresses, in regard to the uniform business rate, that people in individual local authority areas can plan from one year to another because they know what the maximum increase will be. Therefore, is it not incumbent on my right hon. Friend to say whether the five-year period will be extended, for exactly the same reason?

Mr. Heseltine: If we were intending to have a review at the end of the period, it is not realistic to suggest that we will bring the review period forward by announcing that it will happen before the time originally envisaged. Although I understand the point made by my hon. Friend, I do not want to go further than the already known arrangements.

Mr. Gould: I rise again in spirit of genuine inquiry, because I may not know the answer and the Secretary of State may be able to enlighten me. If he will not move on the question of extending the transitional period and will not look at it until the five-year period has elapsed, surely any possible relief under the transitional arrangements would then by definition come to an end, because it would then be too late.

Mr. Heseltine: It would be within our gift to decide to extend the period, or to introduce a new scheme for relief, whatever it might be. Theoretically, it would be possible to make such a decision. There may well have been a revaluation of business properties before then. The arrangements were designed to avoid the fact that there are great gaps between revaluations and all the problems that flow from that. No doubt hon. Members will wish to keep this in mind, but it is not yet on the immediate agenda.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The Secretary of State referred to the increase in the business rate. Can he tell us what percentage that is as a rate of inflation? Is it 9·3 per cent.? Is that the rate of inflation which the Secretary of State intends to use for the increase in the business rate?

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the hon. Gentleman wants to know the rate of increase in the business rate. I believe that it is 10·9 per cent. If I am wrong, I will ensure that the figure is corrected in the reply to the debate.

Once the House has approved the settlement, it is for local authorities to set their budgets. I believe that many authorities will aim to provide a satisfactory level of service while setting a charge no higher than £380. Already there are many signs of authorities being determined to charge less than that.

[Mr. Heseltine]

But this is not the end of the story. The headline charge is not a true reflection of the average charges that people actually pay. This year, the headline charge was £357. With benefits and transitional relief, the actual charge payable was about £280. Already, community charge benefits help more than 7 million people. As I said earlier, the community charge reduction scheme will provide an extra £1·2 million of new money to help about 18 million charge payers. I have deliberately chosen this means of providing help, rather than increasing RSG, so that every penny of the £1·2 billion will go towards reduced charges, not to finance yet more spending.

I think that I said £1·2 million a moment ago; the not unreasonable explanation is that that was written in my speech, but it should have been £1·2 billion. I hope that the House will forgive me for having misled it for those brief moments.

The combination of community charge benefits and the new community charge reduction scheme will, if local authorities play their part, result in average charges actually paid of less than £300.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Going back to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) on the community charge reduction scheme, I think that the scheme and transitional relief are admirable and the right mechanism to use for dealing with hardship, but I should like to raise one example. Let us assume that a couple aged, say about 20, who two years previously were living with their parents, have got married and set up home. The wife may not be working. Such a couple could not receive any relief, as I understand it, unless they qualified for rebate. Surely such people are likely to be hardest hit by the scheme. There should be some way of finding the equivalent of transitional relief for them.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend has raised an important point. The difficulty we had within the confines of the legislation was to find how best to use the money that we could afford to help the maximum number of people. My right hon. Friend has raised an example of people who would not benefit from the scheme which we have put forward. If we had had the legislative framework and the resources to extend the scheme we might have wanted to help that category, but it was not possible within what we could do this year. I must say that honestly to my right hon. Friend.

I have made the point that the actual level of average charge paid is a great deal less than the headline figure about which we hear much more frequently

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the point about how low charges could be, given the help by the Government, and given the fact that councils can look for value for money, will he agree that the work of keeping charges down will be severely hampered by those who deliberately flout the law by refusing to pay their charges, and that the Labour party is instrumental in pushing charges up through that tactic?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes a most eloquent point. I cannot do other than agree with what he said. It is not just that Labour Members refuse to pay the charge and therefore set a wholly unacceptable example as Members of the House: it is that, the more one examines the performance of Labour authorities throughout the country, the more one realises that, in practice, a Labour-controlled authority is more likely to set a high charge than a Conservative authority. It applies to all classes of authority. The House is entitled to an indication of the figures because it will help. The charge payer will make a judgment about whether there is a differene in the level of services.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose——*

Mr. Heseltine: No, I am not giving way. I am about to give a detailed exposition of how much it costs to have a Labour authority, and I will not be blown off course by interruptions from Labour Members who, I would have thought, would want to know what it costs to vote Labour in any area. Let us go solemnly through the figures.

In the London boroughs, if a person is lucky enough to live in a Conservative-controlled borough, the average charge is £285; if he lives in a borough controlled by other than the Conservative or Labour parties, it costs £331; if he moves into a Labour borough, it will cost him £420. If we move to the metropolitan districts, the charge in a Conservative metropolitan district is £309; in a metropolitan district controlled by other than the Conservative or Labour parties, the charge is £334; in a Labour metropolitan district the charge is £369.

If we move into the shire districts, we may find a set of statistics—I am sure they will come out at the elections —which show that there is no difference in Labour or Conservative authorities, but there is a snag; it is called the safety net. The safety net is the amount of contributions that are now being transferred to the centre. When we strip out the safety net, we discover that, in a Conservative-controlled shire district, the charge is £317; in a shire controlled by other than Conservative or Labour, the charge is £355; in a Labour shire district the figure is £408.

The figures are utterly uncontroversial; they are matters of fact. It is a very expensive privilege to live in a Labour-controlled local authority area. Most privileges entail something in terms of value for money but it is highly questionable whether one receives additional value for money in respect of the large extra costs of living in a Labour-controlled local authority area. But, at this late stage, I do not wish to make controversial points— *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Wilshire: We can stick to the truth.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we must stick to the truth.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I think that the case has been clearly set out. The hon. Gentleman will have enjoyed what I said. He can now go and defend Labour-controlled authorities on the hustings up and down the country.

The level of charge next year will also be affected by the efficiency and diligence of authorities in collecting this year's charge. The latest figures show that, by the end of December, authorities had collected 75 per cent. of their expected total yield for the year. That is encouraging, but it is important that authorities should press ahead with collecting the charge for the remainder of the year, using

their enforcement powers where charges are not paid. Those who do not pay the charge merely deny councils funds for their services and shift the burden of payment on to those who pay.

Four formal reports give effect to the settlement. The Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1991-92 sets out my determination of the amount of RSG for that year, the amount of that grant that I propose to pay to receiving authorities and to each specified body, and my specification of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates.

The Population Report (England) (No. 2) contains rules for calculating the relevant population of the area of each charging authority.

The Special Grant Report (No. 2) sets out which authorities will receive area protection grant and inner-London education grant, and the amounts of grant payable.

The Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (England) amends the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), which sets out the basis on which I propose to distribute RSG to receiving authorities.

In addition, the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1989-90 corrects the effects of an error in respect of road lengths in the London borough of Croydon used in the calculation of the borough's grant-related expenditure assessment for 1989-90.

The settlement provides a sound funding base for local authorities throughout England for the coming year. With an extra £4·25 billion of central support, it is sufficient to allow each and every authority properly to discharge its functions and liabilities, provided that it continues to exercise due diligence in rooting out inefficiency and waste. Generous benefits and other forms of relief make possible a national average community charge payment of less than £300. No one who examines the settlement carefully and in detail can reach any conclusion other than that we have struck the right balance. Local government is well provided for in 1991-92. I commend the settlement to the House.

4.52 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I think that it is fair to say that the arrival of the Secretary of State at Marsham street raised hopes that many of the mistakes made in the introduction and administration of the poll tax would at last be corrected. After all, the Secretary of State was one of the few senior Tory politicians who had consistently criticised the poll tax and refused to swallow the propaganda that has constantly assured local government poll tax payers and, indeed, the House, that the tax would be fair and workable. The Secretary of State expressed a proper degree of scepticism about all that. He said:

"The problem is that, from the moment the proposals appeared, their unacceptably regressive nature forced concession after concession, to the point at which today we are left with few of the originally claimed advantages and all of the self-evident disadvantages."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c.621.]

Here was a man, it seemed, who was not easily persuaded by arguments and assertions that appeared to fly in the face of the facts. Unfortunately, he was in a tiny minority in the Tory party. Although the poll tax probably only ever counted a handful of Tory Back Benchers among its committed supporters, those committed supporters unfortunately included the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), and their lead—their insistence that the poll tax was the right answer—was enough to persuade many others that the problems of the poll tax, so evident from the experience of all those who had anything whatever to do with it, were always just on the point of being overcome. I see some of those hon. Members on the Conservative Benches today; they know who they are. They were persuaded to believe what they knew could not be true. They believed what they wanted to believe.

That steady refusal to face the facts and the constant recourse to delusion and self-deception go a long way to explain how the whole sorry saga of the poll tax came to pass. Tory Back Benchers have constantly been told that local government expenditure is at one level when, in reality, it is at a different and much higher level. On the basis of that false assertion, a whole structure of miscalculation has been erected. Revenue support grant has been fixed at levels which, it was asserted, represented substantial increases when, in reality, the grant made painful cuts in services inevitable. On that false basis, hon. Members were told that the poll tax last year would average £278; it turned out to be £357.

Other false assertions were made. Hon. Members were told that calculations could safely be made on the basis that inflation was running at only a proportion of its true rate—the same true rate which the Secretary of State and his predecessor have chosen to apply to the increase in the business rate. They were told that calculations could safely proceed on the assumption that 100 per cent. of the poll tax would be collected, whereas the widespread experience —now confirmed by the Audit Commission—has been of collection levels damagingly lower than that.

Mr. Wilshire: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the factors leading to non-payment has been the campaign waged by the Labour party and that, had the Labour party been reasonable and sensible, levels of collection would be a great deal higher than they are?

Mr. Gould: I do not think that I shall bother with that calumny, except to say yet again that that is not the Labour party's policy and that we have made it clear that, however unfair and unworkable the tax may be, the obligation of poll tax payers is to pay what is due from them.

Mr. Heseltine: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman said about collection. Would he care to comment on the fact that Barnsley, Calderdale, Gateshead and Copeland have collected 93·3, 90·9, 90·8, and 90·8 per cent. respectively of their budgeted poll tax?

Mr. Gould: I am delighted to congratulate those authorities on their achievement. But, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, the Audit Commission, which has looked at the matter in detail, has forecast non-collection levels of a substantial size for a variety of categories of local authority—in the case of the London boroughs, amounting to perhaps 10 per cent. of their expected collection level. That is a serious blow to local authority finances, and augurs badly for the level of poll tax to be fixed in the coming year.

Hon. Members were also told, in this farrago of misrepresentation, that local authorities that set poll tax levels higher than forecast were profligate or extreme and,

[Mr. Gould]

without exception, Labour-controlled. The truth is that dozens, scores, perhaps, hundreds, of Tory councillors, to their great credit, made it clear that their experience did not bear out that false claim.

In the light of that welter of deception, it is little wonder that the poll tax figures never added up. It was not just the unfairness of the tax or the size of the bills that angered people; it was the Government's refusal to face the facts and to assert that much of the trouble arose because Ministers would not concede what was manifestly true.

It was in the hope that he would cut through the web of self-deception and delusion that the Secretary of State was welcomed to his new responsibility. It was hoped that the long-term critic of the poll tax would have no truck with the half-truths and fictions that had been put in place to deflect the truth. It was hoped that he would tell the truth, unpalatable though it might be, as a means of sorting out what then had to be done.

It is disappointing to say that we have to record that the Secretary of State's statement has shattered all those hopes. Far from setting the record straight, he has repeated all the misstatements and the attempts at deception made by his predecessors.

So it is that the Secretary of State reports that local government spending for 1991-92 will be £39 billion rather than the £40·8 billion which local authority associations are adamant is required if they are to meet their obligations. So it is that he can then maintain that his settlement represents a 19 per cent. increase, whereas, in reality, he has settled on an increase of only 7·1 per cent. above this year's spending level, and his revenue support grant will rise by only 1·9 per cent. or £183 million.

So it is that the Secretary of State continues to maintain that, for the purpose of assessing the acceptable increase in local government spending, inflation is only 7·1 per cent. rather than the 10·9 per cent. which he chose to apply to the business rate. So it is that he adheres to his predecessor's estimate that the poll tax this coming year will average £380, whereas everyone in local government and beyond knows that it will be well above £400.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The hon. Gentleman has highlighted today, as he has many times in the past, the difference between what the Government have said the charge should have been and the reality for the poor charge payer. But will he at least agree that, whatever details he might argue about, the first poll tax figure represented no less than £2,500 million of spending above the rate of inflation? Had that not happened, the average poll tax would have been about £70 per adult less than it was.

Mr. Gould: I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's sincerity in putting forward that point, but I suggest that he discusses it with some of his Conservative colleagues in local government—for example, in West Oxfordshire. I think that they will confirm that the poll tax bills were so much higher than forecast because the Government deliberately understated the level of local government spending and the rate of inflation, they deliberately ignored the range of new commitments imposed on local authorities by the Government and they refused to accept that anything other than a 100 per cent. collection was possible. I simply invite the House to cast aside the figures and to recognise that that is where the problem arises.

None of those mistakes, deliberate or otherwise, has yet been corrected. I well understand how anxious hon. Members are about the matter, but for all those who want to believe again that, at long last, the poll tax ills have been cured, I simply say that their hopes will again be dashed.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): The hon. Gentleman has referred to a number of items that he finds unpalatable. Did he find unpalatable the advice from the Association of Labour Authorities that Labour-controlled London boroughs should set the highest community charge that they could get away with? Will he take action to ensure that that does not happen this year?

Mr. Gould: That again is a calumny, and it has no significance. There is no evidence that Labour-controlled local authorities in London or anywhere else did other than set the lowest possible poll tax. The level of poll tax for the coming year will, again, be in line with what is required to try to maintain services and to keep the bill as low as possible.

The truth is that the Secretary of State has changed virtually nothing. All the fine words about fundamental change have left unchanged a revenue support grant, a method of calculating standard spending assessments and a set of capping criteria. The poll tax remains, with all its imperfections and, as a consequence, with all the protective misrepresentations that it now needs in order to conceal the truth. The Secretary of State was not even able to offer help to those groups, such as student nurses or non-working partners, whose cases cry out most loudly for reform.

Yet it will be claimed, and with some justice, that the Secretary of State has at least changed something. He has done away with a discredited transitional relief scheme and replaced it with a proper scheme, trading in realities and not inventions and, so it is said, backed by real money. I wish that all that were true. I wish that hon. Members who so desperately want to be let off the poll tax hook and who want to believe that the new scheme will do the trick were right, but I am sorry to say that the Secretary of State has not only repeated parrot fashion the delusions and deceptions of his predecessors but has, in the matter of his new community charge reduction scheme, invented some new ones of his own.

Let us examine the Secretary of State's claim that he has found £1·2 billion of new money. We should immediately be warned about the reliability of that assertion when the Secretary of State insists that that sum should be added to what he claimed was the £3 billion of new money already provided, when we know that £2 billion of that supposedly new money comes from the beleaguered business rate payer.

The truth about the £1·2 billion is hinted at in the Chancellor's statement on the same subject. He says that, because of the balancing effect of the changes, the overall public expenditure planning total will not be increased by the scheme. We need to know what that balancing effect is. Where does the new money come from, if not from increased public spending? What other budgets are being raided? Is not the explanation at least partly that those who will benefit from the community charge reduction scheme are very largely those who this year are receiving

a rebate? For many of them, what they gain by way of relief under the new scheme will be lost by way of rebate. That is how the trick is pulled. It is not new money, but money transferred from one budget to another. I challenge the Secretary of State to disclaim or deny that point. I also challenge him to come clean about where that money really comes from.

Nor has the Secretary of State succeeded in removing the constraints which so limited the value of the transitional relief scheme. No one who has moved home since 1 April 1990 will qualify, and yet, as the Audit Commission found, in London that could mean that half the population is disqualified from help.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Come on.

Mr. Gould: Yes, in some London boroughs there is a rate of movement of address of between 40 and 60 per cent.

Mr. Squire: I suspect that there are two different figures. There is the number of people who move home, which is a significant proportion, and there are those who move from low-rated properties, who would benefit from this. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify that?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman is right. My point is that, by virtue of that limitation, that large proportion of poll tax payers, whether or not they qualify in other respects, will simply be outside the ambit of the scheme. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

No one who lives in a household of more than two poll tax payers will receive any benefit—an anomaly which is recognised under the Secretary of State's new scheme in the case of those in sheltered accommodation, and very welcome that is, but not for others in similar circumstances but not living in sheltered accommodation.

Let us look at the Secretary of State's assertion that he has corrected the most obvious fiction about the transitional relief scheme—the fact that the calculation of the relief was on the basis of an invented poll tax figure rather than on the bill faced by poll tax payers. On 17 January, the Secretary of State said that the new scheme will compare the old rates bill, which, incidentally, is itself an assumed figure, with the actual poll tax bill being paid. That is simply not the case. That is another example of Ministers inventing a fact when the truth is inconvenient.

As the Secretary of State's statement makes clear, he has entered a new set of figures based on a new assumed poll tax figure for the purposes of his scheme. In most cases, the comparison will not be between the rates and the actual bill for 1991, but between the rates and a new assumed poll tax at the 1990 level, adjusted for the removal of the safety net. Poll tax payers will be left to bear in full any disparity between the assumed figure and their actual bills for 1991.

Mr. Wilshire: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how last year's figure, whether or not it is adjusted, can be described as an assumed figure? The English language is quite clear. Last year's community charges were real, for people paid them.

Mr. Gould: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The term "assumed" poll tax is not my phrase. If he will examine the Secretary of State's statement, he will find a table that sets out in detail the specific poll tax figure for every local authority throughout the country. So much for those Conservative Members who pretend that we do not understand the scheme; it is they who are so clearly ignorant of its provisions.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The hon. Gentleman claims that the scheme will not benefit households in which there are more than two people eligible to pay the community charge, but he must know that that is not the case. A substantial number of elderly people who live with their families in my constituency are benefiting at this very moment from transitional relief and they will benefit more in the future. Why is the hon. Gentleman misleading the House?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman may be able to cite isolated cases and, as I do not want to mislead the House, I admit that my claim that nobody would benefit was too sweeping a generalisation. However, because of the limitation that only two bills can be counted, the vast majority of those living in a household in which more than two people have to pay the poll tax will not benefit. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that that is a fair and accurate reflection of the situation.

The true significance of the new scheme is the need to introduce it at all. Ministers congratulate themselves on protecting—to use their word and that used by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks)—18 million poll tax payers by relating their bills to the rates. The irony that the Government are protecting people against their own poll tax seems lost on Ministers. If that protection is a partial equation of the tax to the rates, why not do the job properly and restore a fair and modernised rating system, as we propose?

The consequence of the Government's continued deceptions and delusions are painfully clear. The Secretary of State's failure to grasp the nettle means that poll tax bills in the coming year will still be much higher than the Government dare to admit. The figure will certainly average in excess of £400. Local authorities will find themselves trapped between an inadequate RSG and the threat of capping. They will be forced not only to fix their poll tax at a higher level than they would wish, but to implement the most painful cuts in grants to voluntary bodies and close leisure facilities, luncheon clubs for the elderly, day nurseries and legal advice centres. The cuts will also hit the level and effectiveness of policing and the morale and efficiency of fire services.

Mr. Rooker: The Secretary of State did not spend much time on policing. Is my hon. Friend aware that the West Midlands police authority and its chief constable believe that the figure set by the Secretary of State will force the authority to get rid of 100 officers? Both the authority and the chief constable were told by Lord Ferrers last autumn to ignore the standard spending assessment because it was imperative, in accordance with Government policy, not to cut the West Midlands force. Where do the figures come from? How can the Secretary of State defend a cut in the number of police officers in the west midlands as a direct result of the figure that he has fixed, when that contradicts the view of the Home Office Minister responsible for policing?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend's point is replicated throughout the country. I have received letters and other representations from authorities of all sizes, functions and

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persuasions, who are adamant that the cuts will be extremely damaging and painful—particularly in respect of police and fire services.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the magnificent lobbying by the fire service today, it was pointed out that Derbyshire's chief fire officer, for example, has warned of cuts of close to £1 million as a direct result of the poll tax and because the Government have allocated additional money to Derbyshire that reflects inflation of only 1·4 per cent., whereas we all know that it has been running at between 8 and 10 per cent. for most of the year? There will be a similar effect on local authorities throughout the country that operate their own fire services.

Mr. Gould: The point that my hon. Friend makes so powerfully in respect of his own local authority is borne out by the experience of many others.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), could not the cost of the extra police officers required in Birmingham have been met had it not been for the expense of the 149 trips to 31 foreign countries paid for by Birmingham city council last year?

Mr. Gould: The fact remains that the pattern of deep and painful cuts in essential services to which I referred will be repeated throughout the country. The hon. Gentleman will soon discover that that experience will not be confined to Labour-controlled authorities.

Ms. Hilliary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): My hon. Friend may be interested to know that I met today teachers and parents from Warwickshire, which is not a Labour-controlled authority, to discuss a proposal to be put before its education committee on Thursday, which will mean the closure of either nine nursery schools or 26 nursery classes. Parents from all over Warwickshire have contacted me because they are up in arms over the Government's insistence that local authorities should take responsibility for their services, while the Government are making vicious cuts in local government grants that will affect young children for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Gould: Conservative Members must be either deaf or blind if they have not yet become aware of the cries of pain from their local authorities. We have certainly heard them and understood their significance, and we recognise the damage that the Government's action will inflict on local services.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I understand why the hon. Gentleman is anxious to shift attention away from Birmingham, but that is where many of the difficulties that created the need to implement such a scheme started. Would not Birmingham be able to solve some of its economic difficulties and problems of homelessness if it did not keep empty 2,500 of its properties? The same goes for many other Labour councils throughout the country that keep thousands of people out of the properties they own.

Mr. Gould: The number of empty properties in Birmingham is less than the national average. Incidentally, when the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) intervened earlier on the question of policing levels in Birmingham, I forbore out of courtesy to point out that Birmingham is not a police authority.

The incontrovertible cuts of which I have spoken will bring disruption and chaos to many local authorities in planning their budgets and finances, but the real losers will be all those who depend on local government services to maintain minimum standards. They will frequently find occasion in their day-to-day lives to curse a Secretary of State who has inflicted such damage on local government.

The Government's actions do not augur well for the so-called fundamental review, which remains shrouded in confusion over its aims, timing and likely outcome. Press reports suggesting that the Prime Minister had offered the prospect of a conclusion before May have, I understand, been disowned. Today, the Prime Minister wrote to me and was able to say no more than

"as soon as we are in a position to announce the result of the review we shall do so."

We cannot take that as a serious commitment, and must therefore assume that his earlier remarks to the 1922 Committee were again contingent remarks—I suppose they were a British equivalent to the Nixonian term "inoperative".

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I am just about to end my speech. The Prime Minister may not have a clue as to what to do about the poll tax. In the light of his speech today and of his revenue support grant statement, it is increasingly clear that the Secretary of State does not have a clue what to do about the poll tax. However, the British people have a clue —they want a Labour Government to sweep the poll tax away.

5.20 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I shall refer to several of the comments of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who is my next-door neighbour, geographically, and whom it is usually a pleasure to follow in debates. Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just left the Chamber, there must be something of an element of déjà vu about returning to the Front Bench and introducing several rate support grant reports. However, in this case the overall effects of the reports are beneficial, not only in comparison with last year but when considering the past decade or so, and I congratulate him on that. It is clear evidence that the Government are listening to representations made from both sides of the Chamber about aspects of the system. In the main, I shall talk not about the system but about the reports and the proper response to them.

The hon. Member for Dagenham was a little curmudgeonly to talk of the Government's listing aggregate external funding and saying that it includes businesses, companies and tax paid. After all, one cannot have it both ways. Either the Government are to be criticised for ensuring that local authorities determine about 25 per cent. of their funding, because the local business element is the majority 75 per cent., or one could say that the money is legitimately used as part of a Government exercise and is part of national funding of local government. I simply do not understand the hon. Member's argument, and I think that it was a bogus point.

The increase of £3 billion is a large figure by any definition, and the 12·8 per cent. increase is substantially in excess of current rates of inflation, plus—as hon. Members know—there is no need for the payment of safety nets in the forthcoming year, so most authorities have done significantly better than the rate of inflation. *[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for Dagenham is listening to me, or at least I think he is. He will shortly be listening to me——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I am listening.

Mr. Squire: I am grateful. The hon. Member for Worsley is most helpful.

During the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham, one might have thought that transitional relief was reaching virtually no one. That is not my understanding. I have carefully read the same papers as the hon. Gentleman has and can say only that in my authority, where the average rates bill in 1989-90 was £501, every couple paying the average rate will gain £105 next year. Many right hon. and hon. Members will find similar figures when they examine the accounts for their areas.

Therefore, it is monstrous to imply that this is a tiny change which will affect very few families. I was talking about the average. People in smaller than average homes —many of whom might have bought their homes from the local authority—will make larger gains. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team deserve congratulations on the size of scope of the transitional relief.

Within the context of the settlement, it was right for the Government to stress again that they expect councils to make savings and to make progress on savings which have been identified by the Audit Commission. Hon. Members who have gone through the Audit Commission's reports will be aware just how wide is the scope for local authorities to make savings, for example, in the area of excess school places—a very large figure indeed—regardless of whether the local authority is under Labour or Conservative control. Collectively there is a lot of wasted money.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Squire: I shall finish this point and then I shall willingly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

One of my hon. Friends mentioned the speed with which empty properties are re-let. That is another area which, apart from its impact on homelessness, is a significant financial element.

Mr. Evans: I support the hon. Gentleman's contention about the number of empty places in schools and the necessary restructuring. Does he agree that the decision of the Secretary of State for Education to allow almost any school in Britain to opt out, under the Government's legislation, is wrecking local authorities' proposals to restructure their education service?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman has an interesting point. It is my understanding that the Secretary of State has considered applications closely and rejected those where the school in question was clearly due to be closed because of a relative lack of popularity—and so he should. However, the hon. Gentleman is moving into wider areas, which we both recognise and may disagree upon. If a school is popular and faces closure because of the arbitrary whim of a local authority, it is right and proper that it should be protected and that parents who choose such popular schools should have their choice endorsed.

I referred to the Audit Commission in an earlier intervention, and I noticed that the Labour party is a little confused about its options on the Audit Commission. I have no doubts and believe that the commission is doing a powerful job. Until recently I thought that that fact was recognised on both sides of the Chamber. The Commission does not invariably attract the approval of either the Government or Conservative Members. At times it is critical of Government, Government Departments and Conservative authorities. However, it brings a degree of independence and objectivity which I suspect are otherwise absent from our discussions.

It is a local authority's responsibility to draw up standards and to ensure that they are met and it is the Audit Commission's responsibility to say whether the authority is meeting those targets or letting down its charge payers. Sadly, there remain too many instances where that is the case. On these occasions it is customary to mention the position in one's own borough, and I should be foolish if I did not do so in this context, although I promise that I shall not make a long speech.

I welcome the small improvement in the way in which additional educational needs are measured and I have passed my congratulations on to the Front Bench. What concerns me are ethnic minorities, as my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have heard me say on several occasions. I take second place to no one in wanting significant amounts of money to be devoted to areas where there is a large number of people for whom English is a second language. That requires considerable resources, and it should be seen as part and parcel of the system.

However, the present system goes much further and talks about two generations of families. I contrast my borough of Havering with Redbridge which, as my hon. but silent Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister, knows, has a considerable number of second or third-generation Asians. Redbridge will benefit substantially more than Havering in the forthcoming year—to the tune of £18·6 million—despite the fact that it has 4,200 fewer adult inhabitants.

I do not criticise Redbridge for that; that is the luck of the draw—the way the cookie crumbles. Nevertheless, I believe that it is unfair, not only to my borough but to others. In most other respects, Havering and Redbridge are very similar, with similar demands, services and life styles. The figure is not only rising, but moving further and further from the level to be expected in a proper distribution system.

My right hon. Friend was uncharacteristically shy about giving the details of improvements that he has made to the standard charge. The charge—which affects many people with second homes—needed reform; several local authorities were exercising their freedom in an unreasonable way. I particularly welcome the maximum multiplier of half that will in future apply to those who are required in live at their place of work, but who also have a home of their own: that will help many people in London.

I am also pleased that people with empty granny flats in their houses will in future be given a zero multiplier, rather than the potential multiplier of one or two, and that those whose homes are awaiting sale after repossession by a mortgage lender will also be given a zero multiplier. Surely

[Mr. Squire]

it is right for us to provide such relief for a category of people—let us hope that it is a small category—who have already suffered so much through the loss of their homes. Similar reliefs are being extended to those experiencing difficulty selling their homes and to elderly people who live in a home or hospital but who have kept on their old homes. Those are important improvements; although, for some reason, the hon. Member for Dagenham failed to mention them, I am sure that, on balance, he welcomes them, too.

The Labour party has a tendency to talk of abolition. I have mentioned the Audit Commission and, in an intervention, I also mentioned competitive tendering. Competitive tendering goes to the heart of not only local government but health service funding; according to the best estimate, the health service is now saving some £130 million a year—which is being devoted to the sharp end of health care—as a result of such tendering. It too is now being ruled out on the diktat of the public sector unions; yet Labour tells us that it is not being dictated to by the unions—that that is all a bad dream of yesteryear.

Surely the fact that the tendering market in local government amounts to some £3 billion is reason enough for it to be conducted as efficiently as possible. It may surprise hon. Members who have misjudged me to learn that I have never suggested that competitive tendering should invariably take place in the private sector. What I do suggest, very strongly, is that, unless checks are made regularly—and, if such checks are voluntary, they will not be undertaken in many authorities—those who ultimately pay the bills will lose out as a result of the abolition of competitive tendering. I urge Opposition Members, especially those with open minds, to reconsider their party's pledge.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke of the possible outcome of the current review. Let me make three final points. First, I urge my right hon. Friend and his colleagues to look carefully at the precepts. I want local authorities to be more accountable to their charge payers for the money that they control and the way in which they spend it. I speak from experience of London, but I am sure that the same applies in other parts of the country.

At present, a substantial proportion of the bills that end up on my constituents' doormats are determined not by the local authority—I am not talking simply about county council versus district council—but by the police, the probation service and goodness knows what other bodies. The local authority then passes on those levies, with no means of control, which, of course, reduces its accountability. I urge my right hon. Friend to give careful consideration to whether, for instance, the Metropolitan police budget should be not only determined but controlled by central Government——

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: And paid for.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend knows about these matters. Yes, it should be paid for by central Government in one way or another, because it certainly cannot be controlled effectively by local authorities.

Secondly, if we wish students to make some payment in the form of local taxation—and I consider that right—we need to change the basis of the system. As a result of the review, the community charge as we know it may cease to exist; but if any form of annual payment is to be retained, my right hon. Friend must give careful thought to the creative ability of students to move from digs to digs in a period of five or six weeks and thus legally avoid any liability.

Students are, after all, creative individuals: the hon. Member for Worsley is well aware of that. We know that students engage in that practice and it will no doubt continue in every university town in the country. We need to change to a system involving an annual payment—of a licence fee, perhaps—to a single central authority, arguably the one within which the college or university falls, and drawing a veil over where the students concerned will be living for the duration of the academic year.

My third point relates to the poorest group in the community, those receiving income support. I supported the proposal—which predates the community charge—for a minimum payment of 20 per cent. towards local services from those on income support, who would then be compensated by an increase in the level of income support. Now, however, everything tells me that, on balance, that was the wrong decision—for all the reasons given by the Audit Commission in respect of the bottom 10 per cent. of the population. My view is reinforced by representations from local authority treasurers, who tell me that an average of 35 to 40 per cent. of their departments' time is spent collecting the money due from those on income support. Even if we allow for an element of exaggeration, that is a staggering figure.

If we wish in the near future to extend to local government an olive branch—a sign that relationships between central and local government could not be better—one of the biggest reliefs that we could give local authorities all over the country would be an assurance that under a new system, whatever form it may take, people on income support will not be expected to pay the charge. It is not worth it; in this context, I question even the accountability argument.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me an early opportunity to speak. I commend the reports and will support them in the Lobby.

5.37 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Let me say at the outset how much I agree with what the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) said about the imposition of a 20 per cent. payment on the poorest sections of the community. I trust that, on this occasion, his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench listened to what he said, and that other Conservative Members also support his suggestion—although it flies in the face of what many of them have said over the past four or five years. I am certain that local authorities, and treasurers in particular, fervently hope that Ministers will act on the hon. Gentleman's wise words.

When the House last debated this issue, on 5 December, I was one of those who gave the incoming Secretary of State the benefit of the doubt. Like others, I had heard and read what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the iniquitous poll tax during the election for the Conservative party leader. On that occasion, I referred to the many serious problems and anomalies that affect St. Helens, due to the poll tax, and I called on the Secretary of State to abolish it. However, I told him that, before doing so, he had

"the chance to prove his mettle by restructuring the SSAs, especially those relating to education and social services, and reintroducing unemployment as a factor in grant support." I told him also:

"If he fails to do that, we shall know that his leadership promises. . .were simply empty rhetoric."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 360.]

After the Secretary of State's speech today about the poll tax, his speech on 5 December and the promises that he made during the Tory leadership election can only be described as empty rhetoric. I suspect that the current exercise is little more than a squalid attempt to save the skins of Tory Members of Parliament with marginal seats in the north of England. They face particularly severe problems on account of local authorities, which previously had low rateable values, having to impose a high poll tax.

There has been no restructuring of the standard spending assessments for education and social services in St. Helens. Even more significant is the fact that no attempt has been made to reintroduce unemployment as a factor in the rate support grant settlement. Unemployment is rising sharply in all the northern metropolitan areas. More and more companies are closing down, which inevitably leads to redundancies. Unemployment was bad last year, but it is even worse this year. No account, however, is taken of that fact in the rate support grant settlement, although it always used to be taken into account in the settlement for metropolitan areas in the north of England.

Therefore, St. Helens has been badly hit by the legislation. I have said on previous occasions, and I shall say it again, that St. Helens metropolitan borough council is very well run. It provides an efficient service to its citizens and it has done its utmost to comply with every Government edict. It had never been rate-capped. However, last year it was poll tax-capped.

St. Helens will be worse off this year than it was last year. The local authority received £46·3 million in grant last year. The settlement for next year is £48·5 million—a £2·2 million increase. If inflation had been allowed at 10 per cent., St. Helens would have received rate support amounting to £50·9 million.

St. Helens is better off when it comes to the uniform business rate. Last year, it received £39·8 million. Next year, it will receive £47·7 million. If 10 per cent. inflation had been allowed, St. Helens would have received only £43·8 million. However, it has lost transitional relief amounting to £3 million. Taking into account, therefore, last year's settlement when St. Helens was capped for the first time, it is now £2·1 million worse off, if 10 per cent. inflation is allowed for.

It is monstrous for the Secretary of State to suggest that local authorities can ignore the rate of inflation. I remind him that a major part of local Government expenditure is accounted for by education, including the salaries of teachers and other employees. That expenditure is not fixed by the local authority; it is fixed by central Government. It ill becomes the Secretary of State to suggest that St. Helens can get away with 7 per cent. inflation and make good the problems that he has deposited in its lap.

St. Helens has done its utmost to ensure that its citizens pay the poll tax, but the level of non-payment runs at 15 per cent. The local authority is doing all in its power to bring that down. Those who are struggling to pay the poll tax greatly resent being charged for those who do not pay it. My constituents tell me that they believe that, because the Conservative Government imposed the poll tax in the first instance, those who argue against paying the poll tax should take up their argument with central Government, not with St. Helens and its other residents. They believe that non-payment of poll tax should be borne by central Government, not by them. They greatly resent having to shoulder that burden.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): In that case, I hope that the hon. Gentleman has made it clear to his St. Helens electorate that that is certainly not Labour party policy, let alone Government policy. It is entirely in the interests of their own pockets that charge payers should ensure that their neighbours pay the community charge.

Mr. Evans: I am passing on arguments that my constituents have put to me. They bitterly resent the poll tax and want it abolished. I have pointed to one of the anomalies. I know what Labour party policy is. It is to get rid of the poll tax. The Minister has always been a great supporter of the poll tax, but I hope to persuade him that Conservative party policy also ought to be to repeal the poll tax.

Mr. Illsley: St. Helens and my local authority, Barnsley, have been prudent by making provision for a certain percentage of poll tax to be levied to cover non-payment. The Secretary of State said that certain authorities—I am sure that he included St. Helens in that statement—have a high collection rate. The collection rate in Barnsley is 93 per cent. That shows that it is not a profligate, high-spending or irresponsible authority. It calculated the exact collection rate and allowed 6 per cent. for non-payment. A collection rate of 93 per cent. shows just how careful it has been, and just how ridiculous it is for the Government to assume that the collection rate can amount to 100 per cent. That is the problem.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has spelt out the answer superbly. The Government were repeatedly warned that to insist on a 100 per cent. collection of the charge was absolute nonsense, and that it would never be reached. Since local authorities receive their grant on that basis, they face a dilemma.

It is also immoral that St. Helens poll tax payers should be required to make good the losses made in collecting the uniform business rate. Small businesses in St. Helens, particularly shops, are going bankrupt at an alarming rate. They cannot then pay the uniform business rate. Consequently, St. Helens poll tax payers have to make good the shortfall. The Minister should go into that matter in detail. St. Helens poll tax payers do not understand why they should have to make good that shortfall.

The Secretary of State may have created confusion over whether or not there will be a review of the uniform business rate within the next five years. He referred to the possibility of a revaluation within that period. If that becomes known in St. Helens, there will be almost a revolution. I hope that the Minister of State will clear up the confusion. If it is thought that there could be another revaluation within five years, those who pay the uniform business rate will interpret it as meaning that they will have to pay even higher rates.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): There is no mystery about this. The

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

hon. Gentleman must look at the statute. Statutorily we are required to have a revaluation every five years, and the next one will be in 1995.

Mr. Evans: The Minister was not in the House, but one of the first things that the Tory Government did in 1979 was to scrap the rating revaluation which was almost in place. Therefore, no one takes a great deal of notice of Government promises in this area. That was when the trouble started.

Another area of concern in my authority, relates to the proposition that the local authority will now have to pay to take non-poll tax payers to magistrates courts. The budgets of magistrates courts have been cash-limited, and I understand that, if the local authority seeks to prosecute non-poll tax payers, a fairly substantial charge will be laid upon it, adding further to the burdens facing my local authority.

My local authority has also asked me to make it clear that it resents the Government introducing new legislation and not making available the resources necessary of its implementation. For example, the Government introduced the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Children Act 1989, both of which my local authority supports as, I would imagine, do most people, but they are not making available the resources necessary for full implementation. Will the Minister of State consider that point? Either the Government should not introduce new legislation, however desirable it may be, or they must make the necessary resources available.

I want to ask the Minister a question about the Gulf which I asked during the Secretary of State's statement a few days ago. Whiston hospital is part of St. Helens and Knowsley health authority and is the regional burns unit. God forbid that any casualties should come from the Gulf and find themselves in Whiston hospital. I hope, as I am sure does everyone in the House, that all our service men and women come home safe and sound and whole in limb. The Secretary of State for Health has made it clear that extra resources will be made available to the health authority, but I must put on record the position facing the local authority.

I am sure that the Minister will accept the principle that if, unfortunately and sadly, any of our service men and women find themselves in that hospital, the chances are that they will be there for some time. It may be that the local authority will be called upon to make available housing and other services for the families of those service men and women. Can the Minister guarantee, particularly for an authority as strapped as St. Helens, that, if additional resources are called upon, the Department of the Environment will make good those costs 100 per cent. so that St. Helens can carry out the duties that it would want to fulfil?

The Secretary of State said that the SSAs were fair for each authority. That is nonsense. If we look at children at risk of abuse, can the Minister explain why the borough of Westminster receives twice as much per child as St. Helens? Surely, if a child is at risk, the authority is entitled to a standard payment. It cannot be right that one authority should receive twice as much as another.

Before the introduction of the poll tax, the average rates bill in St. Helens was £208. The average rates bill in Westminster was £501. Now, the poll tax in St. Helens is more than twice the poll tax in Westminster. Surely it is self-evident that something has gone badly wrong when figures can be reversed as neatly as that.

On the cost of education, the spending assessment per secondary pupil in St. Helens is £1,433 and in Liverpool it is £1,717. Therefore, a comprehensive school in Liverpool with 1,000 pupils receives £284,000 a year more than a similar school in St. Helens. Those two authorities are virtually next door to each other and have almost the same sort of problems. How can that make sense?

May I also point out to the Minister that a poll tax payer in St. Helens has to pay £8 per head towards the debts of the Mersey tunnel? That tunnel is of no economic value to the citizens of St. Helens. No one from St. Helens uses the Mersey tunnel. Can the Minister explain to me or my constituents why they should have to pay, when the citizens of Widnes, who are more likely to use the tunnel, do not have to pay a penny? Those are the sort of anomalies and nonsenses that we expected to have been removed, or at least to have been mentioned, in passing during the review.

The Minister knows as well as I do that St. Helens has never been guilty of profligacy. Indeed, on 5 December, the Secretary of State praised St. Helens. He said:

> "In all our big cities, there are now collaborative projects which show the right way ahead . . . In St. Helens on Merseyside, Ravenhead Renaissance is a consortium of private sector companies and the local council. With Government support, it is regenerating a large run down area of the town."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 322.]

The right hon. Gentleman could have mentioned the Community of St. Helens Trust which has been in place for many years. Many Ministers have been to St. Helens and had discussions with the trust. It is an organisation run between local authorities and business and industry in the town. Its purpose is to successfully launch small businesses. That is another element of the co-operation between Labour-controlled St. Helens council and the local community. Yet St. Helens is now forced to consider every element of its services, which we believe have already been cut to the bone over the past few years, and almost certainly, in the ensuing year, we will face further cuts.

I invited the predecessors of the Secretary of State and Minister to come to St. Helens and go through the local authority's books. I invited them to publish any areas of waste or extravagance they could put their hands on. I repeat that invitation to the Minister and the Secretary of State. We would be delighted to welcome them to St. Helens. We would show them everything that is happening in the town, and we would be delighted to give them the books and invite them to comment.

Dr. Hampson: I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about the St. Helens trust. Nobody supported that more strongly than the present Secretary of State when he was previously Secretary of State for the Environment. I wonder whether the logic of what the hon. Gentleman said is that the council is unable to give spending priority to areas such as that because of the distortion caused by education being imposed as a cost on the shoulders of the local community. Because of the education budget, the council is obliged to cut in other areas. Is that not an argument for him to support the transfer of education away from local authorities, so that they can concentrate on genuinely important local matters?

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no doubt he will be able to make the speech that he is bursting to make on transferring education from local authorities to the centre. A debate will be held on that subject. My only fear is that in the past 12 years I have watched instruments of policy being removed from local authorities to Whitehall. I am not sure that that is the best answer. I shall read the hon. Gentleman's speech and see what points he makes. As he is a well-known supporter of the Secretary of State, it will be interesting to see whether he convinces the right hon. Gentleman of that.

The cause of the problems that St. Helens and other authorities face have is the poll tax. Every hon. Member knows that the poll tax has been, and is, a disaster and that one day it will have to be scrapped. We shall have to wait and see whether the Secretary of State can do that before the election or whether the Labour Government will have to do it after the election.

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) has gone. She was the major instigator of this iniquitous tax. As she has gone, surely Ministers have the guts to do what the Secretary of State said he would do in the leadership election—abolish the poll tax. The people of St. Helens are desperately anxious for that to happen.

6 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I wish to contribute to the debate for three reasons. First, this time last year I was among the dissenters. It would be helpful if I commented on the changes that have been announced since and explain why I wish to commend them.

Secondly, I am one of the select band, or of the unfortunate group, whose minds have been numbed by service in local government. Those who have such experience—good or bad, depending on one's point of view—can help to clear for others the fog around the detail that is before us.

Thirdly, I wish to say a word or two about the aspects of this annual exercise that have an important bearing on the nothing ruled in, nothing ruled out review that is taking place.

I shall explain why this dissenter will be a conformist at 10 pm. This time last year, I readily supported the Government's global allocation of money to local government as a whole, but I disagreed in detail with the way in which it was distributed. Mine was not a particularly easy case. I had to argue that the county of Surrey and its boroughs needed more and inner cities needed less. It did not make me very popular or win too many arguments, but, nevertheless, that argument still applies and it must be put in perspective.

Surrey has the second lowest standard spending assessment per head in the country. Spending per head of population in Surrey—bearing in mind that we are considering spending for notionally the same level of service throughout the country—is £290 less than in Cleveland. Those who are concerned about the treatment of wealthy areas such as Surrey recognise that there should be a differential, but the argument advanced this time last year was that that difference was too great.

Two key issues had to be considered and they have been considered in the interim. The first was that the costs of neighbouring boroughs in the south-east varied little, yet allocations did. For example, Spelthorne, which is slap up against the boundaries of Heathrow airport and which shares the same environment and pressures as the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Hounslow, received significantly less under the "other services" allocation, yet its costs were the same.

The second issue that exercised my mind greatly last year was the education formula. Money for the generality of education was switched to special needs. In previous years, about 12 per cent. of that money had gone to special needs, but it increased to 24 per cent. That made the general education budget appear horribly overspent and caused a distortion in the figures, because special needs were calculated on the number of one-parent families, of which Surrey has fewer than average, on the number of people on income support, of which Surrey has fewer than average, and on the number of people who have a immigrant background, of which Surrey has fewer than average. It took no account of the number of statemented children, of which Surrey has considerably more than average. There was an injustice in that calculation.

I rehearse those objections of a year ago to make one key point—that, when the Government say that they will listen, they do so. When one can put a convincing case, stripped of rhetoric and party-political points, one receives a response. Both issues have been addressed in the calculations that we are considering.

The inner-fringe allocation for other services, which includes the borough of Spelthorne, is higher than the allocation to the outer London boroughs, so my first point was taken on board. The allocation of money to special needs education is down from 24 to 21 per cent., which is a significant step in the right direction. I wish to place on record my thanks and the thanks of councillors in my constituency for the Government's response.

Having said that, I tell my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities that there is still scope for more improvement. We shall continue to press him and his colleagues to listen carefully in the year ahead.

The second reason why I wished to contribute to the debate was that, as one of the select band or unfortunate few, I spent 11 years as a councillor under Labour and Conservative Administrations. Therefore, the points that I shall make based on that experience are not necessarily party political. Those 11 years gave me an insight into local government finance. It was mind-numbing, as I said before, and complex.

I shall give an example of the problems that we encountered. I urge hon. Members to listen carefully because heaven forbid that I should have to repeat it. I draw hon. Members' attention to annex IV of the Revenue Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1989-90, which we are debating in 1991; there is the start of the complexity. Paragraph 3 says:

"An authority's GRP for any level of total expenditure at or above the threshold level is determined by the following formula:

$$\text{GRP} = \text{GRP at GRE} + 1{\cdot}1\text{p} \times \text{threshold amount}$$

$$+ 1{\cdot}5\text{p} \times \left(\frac{\text{total expenditure} - \text{GRE}}{\text{population}} - \text{threshold amount} \right)"$$

I trust that hon. Members are clear about that. It is mind-numbing, but we are being asked to vote on it.

Even if, after 11 years one gets the hang of it—I am sure that Front-Bench Labour spokesmen share my enthusiasm for this—there is always that figure: take away or add the number one first thought of. In the example that

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I gave, it is 1·1p or 1·5p. In other words, if the formulas do not come up with the answers that are required, they are adjusted so that they do. It is an odd system, but Conservative and Labour Governments have used it, so I do not invite people to draw political conclusions from it.

My 11 years in local government suggest that six things must be considered before we vote at 10 pm: first, the global spending figure for the forthcoming year; secondly, the aggregate external finance figure; thirdly, how that AEF figure is distributed—in other words, the SSAs; fourthly, the capping criteria that are used; fifthly, the new invention, the community charge relief scheme; and, finally, the community charge spending calculation for local government generally and for each particular authority.

The global spending figure is not a community charge issue. Whatever system of revenue raising one has, someone will have to fix the global spending figure. I raise that point to make it clear that very little of what is being debated has any real and direct bearing upon the party political aspect of the community charge and its future. Whatever system of revenue raising one has, the global spending figure will always be controversial and tension will be inevitable every year when we come to debate the issue.

Local government, whoever is in control, will be all about articulating and responding to need; and central Government, whichever party occupies Downing street, will have to make statements about minimum standards and about what the nation can afford. Whoever is in power, we shall have to face up to the fact that there is not a bottomless bucket. Anybody who believes that getting rid of or changing the community charge would mean that the global spending figure did not have to be discussed every year is wrong.

As for next year, the £39 billion, which is 19 per cent. more than the figure that was set last year and, as somebody said earlier, 7 per cent. above actual spending for the current year, is fair and reasonable. I hear what people say about inflation this year, but inflation is falling fast and the prediction is that it will go down further. As the Audit Commission says, there is considerable scope for value-for-money exercises to ensure that better use is made of funds. The trap that we must all guard against falling into is simply taking this year's spending and adding something on. That is not the way to justify accounting procedures. The £39 billion, in the case of a well-run authority, could well represent service growth.

Neither is the second of the issues—the aggregate external finance—a community charge issue. Even if local authorities wanted to raise all their money from local people by a different system of collecting tax, somebody at the centre would have to address the question of unequal wealth. Whatever we do with the community charge, somebody, each year, will have to ask how poor the poor areas are, and that will always be controversial. Returning to my "Surrey versus Cleveland" point, I must say that we shall disagree for ever about where the definition lies. Equally, somebody will always have to take a decision on what percentage, irrespective of the method used to collect money locally, should come from the centre. Every year, whatever we do about the community charge, we shall have to have this debate.

It is important to understand how the tension, the conflict, should be managed. That takes the focus of the debate away from the community charge and puts it where it should be. This part of the debate should be about what services local government ought to provide. In other words, how big is the total spend? Asking that question helps one to arrive at a decision on how to split expenditure up. Secondly, what variations in standards across the country are acceptable?

If one cannot accept a variation in the spelling ability of children, the centre will have to take a bigger hand in the control of the service that is provided. I contend that the greater the control from the centre, the greater the extent to which money will come from the centre rather than from local people. That debate has nothing much to do with the community charge, but everything to do with the issues that are before us.

I think that the AEF figure of £26·05 billion for 1991-92 is fair and reasonable. It is 12·8 per cent.—above even the highest figure given for inflation—and, whatever may have been said, it includes £3 billion of new money to help local government. That sort of settlement, in my judgment, more than maintains the status quo. For next year it will mean that local authorities, if they go about running their business properly, can choose whether to reduce the community charge or to improve services—or to have a combination of both.

When one turns to the distribution of the money that comes from the centre one sees again that the SSAs are not a community charge issue in themselves. The SSAs reflect varying needs across the country and the varying affluence of different parts of the country. Differing needs and differing affluence existed before we had the community charge and they will continue to exist. Anybody who thinks that scrapping or reforming the community charge would result in our not having to have this part of the debate each year misunderstands the true nature of what is going on.

It is important that we should ask ourselves why the SSAs were introduced at the same time as the community charge. It was always assumed that there was a link because community charge meant SSAs. It did not. SSAs came about because there was a belief that the old system was "US" and had to be done away with, that, whether or not we changed the rating system, we had to bring in a system——

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): "US"—useless.

Mr. Wilshire: If the hon. Gentleman wants me to say "useless" I am happy to do so. The old system was useless. It was clapped-out. It was an awful system. The hon. Gentleman and I had to try to understand it and work it. As the years went by, it got worse and worse, and it had to go. If hon. Members, whether on the Government side or on the Opposition side, want to change the community charge, let them not suggest that the whole grant system has to be chucked out as well. It is a wholly different issue. The old system was awful.

It is important to understand the theory of the new system. Its purpose was to address once and for all the question of needs—to assess needs. The other thing that it set out to do was to be simple. I concede that it was bound to take time to settle down. One must bear in mind the fact that simplicity in itself actually militates against the

fine-tuning that hon. Members now seem to want. If all of us are not very careful, if we engage in special pleading —saying "Adjust this" and "Adjust that"—we shall end up with a system as complex as the one we got rid of, and in a year or two I shall be joining the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) in describing it as useless. We must be careful. We must distinguish the SSA system from the community charge itself. There are still ways in which the issue needs to be addressed. I referred to the example of special education.

Capping is equally an issue about which we have to be clear. Despite the rhetoric, capping is not a community charge issue. Central Government will always need some means of enforcing control over local government. Even the Labour party, in its most extreme moments when it says that local government should be set free, says, in very small type and in brackets at the bottom, "unless". If one thinks about this in a detached way one must agree that the nation state has to control public expenditure. I repeat that capping in itself is not a community charge issue.

Dr. Hampson: I think that my hon. Friend will agree that, in quite a number of countries, local authority funds are not provided out of national Treasury accounts. It seems to me that the reason for the scale of local authority spending—more than one quarter of total public expenditure—is simply that the system, indeed the whole structure, of local government is determined by expenditure on education.

Mr. Wilshire: I accept that. My hon. Friend started by saying that we do not need to have controls, and he went on to explain why we do. If one wanted local authorities simply to provide rubbish bins and the odd seat, that would be a different matter. I shall come back to this point, as it relates to where I believe successive Governments have gone wrong.

I believe that what is set out for 1991-92 makes good sense. Giving advance notice is the best way of helping local government. During my days in local government, we always moaned about never knowing from one moment to the next what was required of us. On this occasion, local government has been told what is required well in advance and knows what is coming. If we are to have the present system of capping, the criteria are reasonable. The procedures for going through the mechanisms of capping are sensible and reasonable as well.

Control of whatever sort is bound to be controversial because somebody will always argue that control from the centre—this brings me to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson)—limits local freedom of action. However, the control need not be as controversial as it is. For some time now, the target of capping has been expenditure and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West made the point that it depends what the money is spent on. The method that has been used until now has been to try to control income. If the target is expenditure and the means is income, we should not be surprised if confusion is the result.

We should, equally, not be surprised if we end up with ineffective control. I make the plea for future debates that, at some stage, we find a way to switch control from the mechanism of charge capping or income capping to controlling expenditure. A bonus from that is that the way in which income is raised becomes far less controversial if it is not the mechanism for trying to control expenditure.

The community charge relief scheme is the only community charge issue before the House today and we should all realise that. There are two ironies. First, we have in front of us a scheme that we all wanted, yet we are saying that somehow the community charge needs to be adjusted for 17 million people. That strikes me as slightly odd. Secondly, to bring in the help that we need, we have to fall back on the rating system and on rateable values as the means of calculating relief. However, the present scheme will give a great deal of help to many people.

I have never argued that the borough of Spelthorne has been in the vanguard in making complaints about the effects of the community charge. However, even in my borough—and how much more it must be the case in boroughs that have greater problems—the scheme will bring a great deal of help. In the current year, some 7,000 people out of 70,000 are getting some sort of relief. Although the figures have not been finalised, it seems that, in the year from April, the 7,000 will become at least 20,000 to 25,000. That is the measure of the extra help, and I am sure that my constituents will be grateful for it.

I trust that the scheme will be temporary. If it is left in place permanently, it will continue to undermine the financial accountability on which the community charge principle was built. Distributing relief in this way also confuses in the public mind who is responsible for the redistribution of wealth. If we were to have such a permanent scheme, my plea is that we should find a method of income support as a means of redistribution rather than using rebates in the hands of local government.

The way in which the Government calculate what the community charge should be is not in itself a community charge issue. It is only a community charge issue in so far as the system that we have is the community charge. If we were to get rid of it, we should still have to make a calculation about what the method of income should mean to the individual payer. As my right hon. Friend said at the beginning of the debate, the figure of £381 is a norm or average for the country as a whole. It is certainly an achievable norm, and it may be worth testing that average figure against the real world.

In Surrey, £381 looks achievable. It seems that the lowest district charge in Surrey is heading for about £340 and that the highest is heading for about £470. It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friends that the highest figure comes from the one council that is not controlled by the Conservative party. The estimates are realistic and achievable, and the experience in Surrey suggests that other counties and boroughs could follow suit.

There are implications for the review that my hon. Friend the Minister and others are undertaking. I urge my hon. Friend to take on board the implication of the fact that only one of the six issues that I have mentioned is a community charge issue. However we raise local tax, central Government will always set expenditure limits and central Government money will always be needed. Wealth redistribution will always be required and central Government will have to have a fallback mechanism for enforcing their requirements. That means that, if all one reviews is finance, the review must go wider than simply addressing the method of local taxation.

Some say that modifications to the community charge are necessary, but they must not be dealt with in isolation.

[Mr. Wilshire]

Modification is necessary and what has been done this year is timely, but the modifications—and any that are brought forward next year—will not produce a long-term solution. Even if abolition of the community charge is considered to be the way forward, that will deal with only one of the six issues that I have addressed. The review must go further than that.

Just as one cannot address the community charge in isolation from finance generally, so it is equally impossible to address the general question of finance in isolation from all the issues of local government. One must also address the questions of territories, services and local democracy. If I go too far down that track, I shall rapidly go out of order, so I will confine myself to two points about the review as it relates to the community charge.

The review must be comprehensive and it must proceed in the right order so that finance is dealt with at the right time. The review must start with territories and it must then deal with boundaries, with the single-tier issue, with service delivery and with local democracy. Only then should it move on to finance generally. Only after it resolves the general issues of finance, including all the six issues that I have mentioned, should it move on to the question of how one raises local revenue.

Finance is a means and not an end. If it is elevated to an end in its own right, we shall not get the cure that we want. The details of services, territories and local democracy must be worked out first so that finance—the means of delivery—is moulded to the new model that will come out of the review. It is therefore far too soon to come up with a solution to the long-term future of either the revenue support grant debate, which we are having today, or the community charge.

I suspect that the results of the review may make local government look so different that an entirely different system of revenue support grant or an entirely different system of local tax could look sensible. Perhaps—surprise, surprise—a modified community charge, given an entirely different definition of local government, could strike people of all parties as being both fair and convenient. However, for the time being, we must stick to the short term and we must stick with the present issues.

The Government have responded well to the issues that they are capable of addressing quickly. The reports represent substantial improvements compared with last year's procedures. However, there is no other realistic scope—I regret this a little—for improvement before 1 April this year. In the circumstances, I hope that all those who, like me, were dissenters last year will change their minds and say that there has been improvement which we should support while serving notice that, by this time next year, we hope that there will be even more change and improvement that we can support again.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): This matter concerns some of the most vital services for our constituents. It is proper that we remind ourselves that, although we may be speaking of a little more than 25 per cent. of the country's expenditure, nevertheless we are helping to deliver important services. I refer to services such as education, housing, social services, care for the elderly, the police, environmental health and planning. The list is long. Those services are so vital that the time that we spend on this matter is most important.

The Secretary of State's first test is to assure the House that he believes in those services and that they should be delivered. The 7 per cent. expenditure increase over the previous year's budget does not meet the real needs for services. It is also a little hypocritical that the Secretary of State should confirm that, in looking at the figure for the increase in business rates, he took the level of inflation at 10·9 per cent., but that, in looking at the percentage for the increases in services and local authorities' needs, he took the figure of 7 per cent.

Mr. Portillo: Nineteen.

Mr. Bellotti: It is interesting that those different figures are arrived at to suit the Government. I am grateful to the Minister for reminding me of the percentage that he quoted. I shall demonstrate the percentage that the Government are quoting.

The high increase that is falling on business rate payers, who are currently finding it difficult to keep their small shops and businesses open, is not matched by the Government in cash terms. For example, the Government's own principal contribution to the revenue support grant, taking away the business rate increases, shows an increase of only 1·9 per cent. I shall be interested to hear the Minister confirm whether he considers that figure to be accurate.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said about aggregate external finance. Like me, he has served on local authorities for more than 11 years, and he knows that that is a key figure in the delivery of local services. The aggregate external finance this year will fall from 70 per cent. to 67 per cent. That means that local authorities will get less help from the Government-controlled part of the money that they need to provide their services.

We must remind ourselves that inflation is 9·3 per cent. or thereabouts. Therefore, one matter that the Minister must consider is what level of pay increases local government workers are likely to achieve this year. We were reminded that teachers account for most local authority wage increases, and that such increases should be in the region of 9 per cent. If they are in that region, where is the money to fund them? Are local authorities supposed to cut other services to pay the proper wages that they should? Those questions remain after looking at the overall financial package that the Government are placing before us.

I shall refer to one or two authorities to try to demonstrate that it does not matter whether we are discussing Conservative-controlled, Labour-controlled or Liberal-Democrat-controlled authorities; the picture is still bleak for every local authority.

For example, East Sussex county council has fared rather well in terms of capital allocation. Nevertheless, a report clearly shows that the standard of our school buildings is such that we need to spend an enormous sum, which the Government will not permit us to spend, to bring those buildings back up to the required standard. We have one of the highest-rising pupil numbers in the country and our staying-on rate is one of the best. However, we are penalised by not being able to be able to invest in school buildings to provide for those pupils.

The Government are taking into account the balances that they expect local authorities to have. In the case of East Sussex, our balances this year, at only £3 million, mean that we are being doubly penalised for not holding money in the bank and for wanting to deliver services but not having the money for them.

I am not attracted to the argument that two or three Conservative Back-Bench Members have made about moving education into the centre to reduce the community charge or poll tax. I wonder whether those hon. Members are suggesting that they would leave local authorities with the sum of money that they currently have, but not require them to provide education. That could become a slightly atractive proposition, but I am sure that the Government would not do that. I am sure that they would remove the amount of money that they expect to be spent on education, leave local authorities with less money to provide fewer services and then provide education from the centre, where it could be controlled.

Having considered central Government expenditure in recent years, I am not convinced that they are very good at controlling expenditure. Local authorities are much better at doing that. I am attracted to the proposition, but I wonder what Conservative Members are actually saying when they make such points.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): The hon. Gentleman's point is absolute nonsense. Perhaps I can help him by telling him that central Government expenditure between 1984 and 1989 increased by 2·4 per cent. Over exactly the same period, local government expenditure increased by 9·4 per cent. Elementary maths will tell the hon. Gentleman that, far from central Government expenditure increasing faster, local government expenditure increased faster—by a factor of four times over that period.

Mr. Bellotti: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I shall deal with his point straight away. As I was a county councillor since 1981, I shall be pleased to send the hon. Gentleman a list of the responsibilities that central Government have placed on local government and, therefore, the costs that local government has had to bear as a result. Central Government have not made available the money to pay for those services.

Mr. Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman has made one intervention. I wish to proceed.

Mr. Mitchell: I am responding.

Mr. Bellotti: If the hon. Gentleman is responding, I shall give way.

Mr. Mitchell: I do not wish to compound the hon. Gentleman's ignominy. He made a point about the increase in local government expenditure as against the increase in central Government expenditure. He then tried to wriggle out of his first point. Although it is true that there has been a change in the allocation of responsibilities as between central and local government, it goes both ways. The hon. Gentleman will reflect on the success of the Government's right-to-buy policy, which has been a trend in the opposite direction. Therefore, he must accept that those matters go both ways.

Mr. Bellotti: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for elaborating his point. If one is on the receiving end in local government, one sees central Government burdens year after year. We should not continue the dialogue. The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I have made mine. I hope that my next point will help him.

I now refer to the financing of the police of East and West Sussex. Lord Ferrers sent a letter to hon. Members pointing out the level of extra policing available. He said that, since the Government came to office in 1979, 179 extra police officers had been allocated for East and West Sussex. Of course, Lord Ferrers did not point out the extra responsibilities that had been given to those police authorities.

First, the policing of Gatwick airport has increased enormously because of the extra security that the Government properly wanted to be provided there. Secondly, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 has led to the need for extra staff in police stations. Those extra costs have fallen on Sussex police authority as a result of Government policy. The policy is not disputed, but the resources do not follow the policy. We have no extra police officers on the streets of East and West Sussex, because all the extra 179 police officers are involved either at Gatwick airport or in Police and Criminal Evidence Act duties.

It was stated that Eastbourne borough council is one local authority that has done particularly well this year. I pay tribute to my predecessor, the late Ian Gow, who last year led a deputation to the Minister because of the very poor settlement for Eastbourne borough council. Last year's settlement was 16 per cent. lower than the previous settlement under the grant-related expenditure assessment system. That is an appalling situation—one of the worst in the country. My predecessor's efforts have led to an improvement this year, but, taking the two years together, we are still well below the average of other districts in our county and well down the list of districts in the country.

My point is that Eastbourne borough council, like many other local authorities, is spending an enormous sum of money collecting the poll tax and that has not been reflected in the amounts of money which Government have been giving to local authorities. I am sure that, if the burden of the poll tax were removed by abolishing it, local authorities would be able to use the money that has been allocated in a more cost-effective and service provision-led way.

The position in another area not far from mine Sussex demonstrates how ridiculous the reports are. This year the Government have allocated, through revenue support grant, £89 to each person in Hove in East Sussex and £169 to each person in Adur in West Sussex. Yet there are a couple of streets—St. Richard's road and Bramblydene road—in which those two local authorities each have houses. So there are people living next door to each other, some in Hove and some in Adur, for whom Government contributions per head differ by 100 per cent. The cost of delivering a service in that area is almost the same, whether it be refuse collection, environmental health, planning, leisure or recreation. How can the Government say that they will give 100 per cent. more in one house than in the house next door? It is absolutely ridiculous and brings the poll tax into disrepute.

Those figures are very interesting when compared with figures across the country. In Westminster, for instance, the equivalent figure is £998. How can it be said that a person living in Westminster can have £998 from Government while people living in Adur get only £89? It really is ridiculous.

[Mr. Bellotti]

Earlier the Secretary of State said that there were those on the Opposition Front Bench saying that there were cuts when there was none. Warwickshire local authority is looking at its education programmes. But it had already made cuts of £0·75 million in its social services before examining the cuts now necessary as a result of these reports. Stockport authority has made cuts of over £2 million in its social services and more than 200 of its home helps and social workers will lose their jobs as a result of the reports.

The standard spending assessments do not take account of debt charges. When local authorities have very old housing, where the private sector is very unlikely to come in and pay and people do not have the sort of incomes that enable them to purchase from the council, a disproportionate cost falls upon them. I think particularly of Pendle, where the cost will now fall on the general fund and be met by poll tax payers. This seems very unfair, given that other authorities have advantages over authorities such as Pendle because of its historical housing provision.

The Secretary of State for the Environment referred to poll tax payers who are serving in the Gulf area. Some local authorities will bear an average burden in terms of meeting some of the refunds or the results of people not being charged, but other local authorities will be disproportionately hit. I know of four or five such authorities, of which Gosport is an example. The position there is very serious. I know that the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has already raised the issue, but I refer to it again because it demonstrates the problem. The cost to Gosport council in terms of revenue lost as a result of our troops being engaged long term in the Gulf will approach £1 million in a year. No local authority can afford to lose that sort of money from its proposed budget.

Therefore, I call on the Government to try to meet that point wherever they can. It would be unfair for local authorities with high proportions of troops normally resident in their areas to have to meet that burden over and above the burdens they already bear. I hope that the Minister who will reply to the debate will give a little encouragement to local authorities that have to put up with that extra burden.

It is ridiculous that we can be told by the Secretary of State for the Environment that service men who are away for fewer than 61 days will be liable for poll tax, whereas those who are away for over 61 days will not. Could a more ludicrous situation be imagined in these difficult and tragic circumstances than for our troops to be coming home just at the point when a few hours one way or another would make a difference to paying the poll tax? In these very exceptional circumstances, surely all the troops serving for us in the Gulf should be exempt from poll tax. There should be no doubt about that.

What does the House think that local authorities should be doing to contribute to their communities? The reports are so tight that local authorities have great difficulty carrying out all their statutory functions and cannot even begin to address things that might benefit the local communities.

During the football world cup in Italy last year the stands, the stadiums and all the facilities were tremendous. On inquiry, it appeared that they had been provided through a mixture of central Government, local authority and private funding. But what do our Government do to help football clubs to provide stadiums which, we hope, will become the venues for the 1998 world cup? The Football Trust and the funds for it came about only as a result of a reduction in taxation—a movement of money, not extra money that the Government found.

There are currently 120 applications before the Football Trust, not one of which is a partnership proposal that includes the local authority. No local authority in this country could afford to join a community-inspired and led proposal to improve football stadiums. The Government are very quick to blame those who cause problems in football grounds, but very slow to provide the funds to improve them. I should like the Minister of State to find a mechanism to enable our football clubs to provide, in partnership with local authorities, the facilities that we should have in this country.

In Italy we saw 12 stadiums, which cost about £30 million each, and at the end of the world cup they were being used by the local communities for squash, indoor tennis, indoor football, weight training, and so on. If the Government do not believe that those things are worth providing money for, they should say that they do not want to involve themselves in schemes that benefit local communities and the people would know not to vote Conservative in future elections. But the Government do not say that and we do not get the facilities that we should have.

In our area in Sussex, Brighton and Hove Albion has, in the past few days, put on a tremendous performance in bringing Liverpool back to Brighton for a replay. But we are locked in a discussion to try to find a new stadium for the area. The local authorities cannot help with pump priming, the Government do not help very much and private enterprise, with interest rates as they are, cannot help. So our facilities are inadequate. The Government could do much to encourage the building of a new football stadium in the Brighton area. We shall need it, because I am sure that, after the replay on Wednesday, we shall welcome another Merseyside team to Brighton for another match.

The problems of local authorities will be solved only when we have a Government who believe in local services and wake up to the fact that the only answer is to abolish the poll tax. The poll tax is unfair, unjust and unworkable. Government grants to local authorities are unfair and almost inexplicable. The reports will do nothing to improve local government services, and that is why we shall oppose them.

6.49 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to hon. Members who are waiting to speak, for the fact that I must slip out later for the best of reasons—that I have a meeting with some of my local councillors. I am interested to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), because, since my earliest youth, I was a Brighton and Hove Albion supporter. I spent many hours on the terraces. Since those days, when it was in the third division south, until now, when it has climbed the league and reached cup finals and the first division, it has not once appealed to the Government for funds to help it. It succeeded on its own initiative, and I shall continue to support it and other clubs which seek to raise money for stadiums.

It was interesting to hear a Liberal view on local government finance. We do not get too much of that in Wandsworth. Not only are there no Liberal councillors, but no Liberal candidate stood in the last borough elections in my constituency. That is down to the good sense and wisdom of the local Liberal party. Clearly, it congratulates the Conservatives on getting it right and sees no need to oppose them. I hope that my thanks will go via the hon. Gentleman to his colleagues, if there are any, in that part of London.

I wish to respond to some points made by hon. Members who have, perhaps temporarily, left the Chamber. The hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) made a fair and valid point, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to it. He asked about social services and community services for people who may return injured from the Gulf. I am sure that it is the wish of the House that money is made available for such services in the same way as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has swiftly responded to the need to provide extra finances for the health service, if necessary.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North also made an interesting point about education. To some extent, we have covered that by our legislation to permit local education authorities to be a little more flexible in pay bargaining and remove some of the rigidity of central pay bargaining. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will find that that assists him in St. Helens, as it will assist people in other parts of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) made an interesting bid. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will consider it in the review. It related to people on income support and the amount of charge that they should pay. There is an alternative to not collecting the charge from them. We should enable them to continue to have a say in how their money is spent but insist that they pay 20 per cent., not of the actual but of the assumed charge. That would give local councils a great incentive to make sure that their charge was reduced to less than the assumed charge, as it is in Wandsworth. Income support recipients would then be in pocket. That would be an additional benefit to charge payers on income support, and something similar could be considered for students.

I have some sympathy for the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who opened for the Opposition. If ever there was a poisoned chalice, it must be the Labour spokesmanship on matters of local government finance. For a start, he has the cross of his own policy, which is to burden the nation with the capital value tax plus revaluation. Then he has Labour councils all around the country which are hellbent on overspending and wasting the resources that they receive from taxpayers and chargepayers. Then he has the political element, to which I referred in an intervention, from the Association of London Authorities. The hon. Gentleman accused me of calumny, but it is in black and white. If there is any calumny, it is that of the Labour party in London against voters and charge payers in London.

Then the Opposition spokesman has behind him and outside the House supporters of non-payment, with all that that does for people who are much less well off than hon. Members. Non-payment places a greater burden on such people to pay for local services than if everyone paid his share. Lastly, the hon. Gentleman has the policy of coming cap in hand to the taxpayer to ask for more. One can do that only by asking taxpayers to pay more tax; that is yet another burden on both taxpayers and chargepayers.

This debate is something of an annual set piece. I suppose that we shall always have it; it will always be with us. We shall always have our rate support grant debate, irrespective of the type of system, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said. We should pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues—both officials and Ministers—at the Department of the Environment. In a past life, I have seen at first hand the painstaking and patient way in which they listen to representations from hon. Members and local authorities. They take on board suggestions made and come up with steady ways of refining and improving the system.

What has been missing from the debate so far is a message from the House to local government. Understandably, the debate is about the challenge to Government to assist in paying for local government services. What has been missing is the challenge from Government and Parliament to local government to use those resources efficiently and wisely and in the best interests of local people. If we do not get that right, local government will not be right.

So the debate is about balance. As Carlyle said, it is a "vain hope to make men happy by politics".

I suspect that the same is true of local government finance politics. Nevertheless, there should be a balance between the various interests. If we can get that right we can begin to see some progress.

We must understand that the resources for local government do not come out of thin air. They come out of the pockets of taxpayers and charge payers. The balance that we seek is three-way, if it is possible to have a three-way balance. It is not so much squaring the circle as squaring the triangle of balance between quality, need and cost. The Government can create the framework with the standard spending assessment system which allocates according to the services needed given the type of area. The Government can then help with the cost through the rate support grant.

I welcome the other measures introduced to assist the individual through targeted support by means of rebates and transitional relief systems, but local government can add quality through efficiency. That surely goes for the recipients of all central government finance who run local services, whether in the health service, education, local government and so on.

The figures for this year are fair. In my area of inner London, it is a fair settlement. It is much better than the third-third-third distribution between chargepayer, business rates and central taxation which one might expect. In inner London, £2·4 billion out of the standard spending assessment of £2·9 billion comes from external finance, which is to say from the Government, via revenue support grant, the uniform business rate and one or two other grants.

In Wandsworth, the standard spending assessment is £285 million. We have an expected community charge raising of £75 million. These figures are all based on a community charge which I hope will be an exaggerated version of what is paid at the end of the day, but that depends on many things—not least the willingness of some

[Mr. John Bowis]

Labour Members who have second homes in my constituency to pay their fair share. I am sure that Labour Members who are present will encourage them so to do.

The total external support for Wandsworth is £235 million. Before any Labour Member seeks to compare like with unlike, may I say that the right way to make comparisons is to take the figures for comparable boroughs of inner London? Wandsworth receives less external support than the average for inner London. It receives £1,192 per adult, as opposed to the inner-London average of £1,397. The neighbouring boroughs in south London are Lambeth and Southwark. Taking the figures for RSG, Wandsworth receives £141 million, Southwark £150 million and Lambeth £201 million.

In total external support, Wandsworth receives £235 million, Southwark £236 million and Lambeth £268 million. If we translate reasonably comparable figures for reasonably comparable boroughs—comparable in the make-up of the electorate, problem areas and so on—we might assume that the community charges would be reasonably comparable. In practice, whereas Wandsworth has been able to come up this year with a community charge of £148, the charges in Lambeth and Southwark—before capping—are £548 and £390 respectively.

It is not the new system which has resulted in the figures. In the previous year, the average household in Wandsworth was paying £385 in rates, more or less the equivalent of two community charges, but in Lambeth the average household was paying £516, which is less for the average household of two people than one person is now being asked to pay in community charge. In Southwark, the figure is a little better, but not a great deal.

There has to be a message in all that about the efficient use of resources. I think that it is time the House sent a message back to local councils, particularly Labour-controlled councils. This does not apply to all Labour councils, but to many of them. It is time that they examined their efficiency and the quality and cost of their services in the interests of their local communities.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Wandsworth has just had to close three law centres and a large number of voluntary organisations. What is particularly sad is that it has begun to close youth clubs. Is the reason for the closure of the youth clubs the fact that the Government are too mean, that Wandsworth is too mean or that the youth clubs are too extravagant?

Mr. Bowis: There has been rationalisation of youth clubs, day centres, luncheon clubs and so on. I have been to one luncheon club, for example, where there were only 12 people. There were four law centres; there is now one, but that is comparable to many London boroughs. To have had four was unique. It was not a question of closing them; charge payers' support for those voluntary organisations was removed.

At the same time, Wandsworth pays £9 million in grants to voluntary organisations, substantially more than the average for inner London. It insists that the money which it raises from charge payers and hands on to the voluntary sector goes to the sharp end services and not to the umbrella organisations or to organisations for which alternative sources of funding are available. If the hon. Member for Norwood, (Mr. Fraser) would urge his colleagues from Lambeth to come and see us, we would be happy to assist them to find greater efficiency savings. To be fair, on some occasions they have done so.

Over the 12 years of Conservative management of the borough, Wandsworth has made £50 million of efficiency savings. If a council makes such savings while maintaining the quality of services, it has resources to improve the quality of life in the area and to keep charges low. Wandsworth provides 123 services, at a cost to the individual of £148. That is not a bad bargain in anybody's book.

The message of tendering is crucial to that record. It is sad to hear the Labour party committing itself to the abolition of competitive tendering. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has said that a future Labour Government would relieve local authorities of going out to compulsory tender. That is short-sighted. In Wandsworth, we have found that tendering is not only of benefit when the service goes out to the private sector—on those occasions, we have found that efficiency savings of 33 per cent. were made—but even when the in-house services applies for and gets the tender, the result being a 25 per cent. saving. So there are savings through the tendering process, whether or not the service eventually goes outside. To cancel that benefit to the local community is crazy.

When people talk about my borough, they sometimes say that we have cut services in order to get a low charge. That is not right. The first priority is to improve services, and the second priority is to make sure that the cost is as low as possible. That can be done. The staffing ratio for inner London is 3·7 per 1,000; in Wandsworth, it is 2·1 per 1,000. In refuse collection, savings of 50 per cent. have been made over the years. The reason is that, in the Labour borough of Southwark, one man collects one tonne of rubbish per day, whereas in Wandsworth one man collects four tonnes of rubbish per day. There are straightforward efficiency savings. The service is better, and the public are more and more satisfied with it; they are very satisfied with the lower cost.

The cost of running libraries has been reduced by 45 per cent. Book usage has gone up by 40 per cent. The arrears of rent in my borough are half the inner London average. Rent and community charge arrears can pay for services. If a council does not collect the money, it cannot provide the services. If Lambeth collected its rent and community charge arrears, based on last year's figures, it could pay for the equivalent of half the cost of Wandsworth's education service.

We have heard about the threat to district auditors from the Labour party.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Before he leaves the excellent reputation of his own borough in comparison with Southwark, my hon. Friend might be interested to know that Councillor Keeble, the council leader, said on Radio 4 not many months ago:

"There has not been a proper management structure in the housing department."

Clearly, the deficiencies of the housing department are mirrored in the deficiencies of the cleansing department.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One sees that again and again. The Audit Commission highlights the problems. It published a well-known comparison between inner-London Labour boroughs and inner-London Conservative boroughs. It was no great surprise

that the result was that half the quality was provided at twice the cost in the Labour boroughs. That is what we are seeking to get rid of.

Quality is crucial. The efficient use of resources results in improved estate management, improved tower blocks, improved shopping parades, improved crime prevention schemes and improved enterprise, with many black businesses being assisted to start up. The capital programme resulting from sales receipts has transformed a miserable, wretched, rundown inner-city Labour borough into the thriving hub of activity and enterprise, attracting jobs and people to live there, that my borough is today. Surely, that must be the message.

Labour and Liberal-controlled authorities have the weapons in their hands: they can make efficient use of the resources from the taxpayer and the top-up resources from the community charge payer. I can assure the House that my borough will continue to make efficient use of local and national resources to provide quality services at reasonable cost. That is possible throughout the country —subject only to two threats in addition to the unwillingness of some Labour-controlled authorities to tackle the problems.

The first threat is non-payment, which was dealt with adequately earlier in the debate. The second is the problem of overspenders—those who simply cannot control their spending. Given that those problems are kept under control, we can wholeheartedly support the settlement, which is both fair and reasonable. However, the reasonableness and fairness of the settlement depend on the councils playing fair by their charge payers.

7.10 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Characteristically, the Secretary of State left the Chamber as soon as he could after the opening speeches. He was not an assiduous attender while he was not on the Front Bench but perhaps he ought to be slightly more assiduous in respect of debates for which he is responsible. Let me begin with a point on which I tried to intervene during the right hon. Gentleman's speech. As I could not catch him at the time, perhaps his hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will pass my remarks on to him.

The Secretary of State evaded some of the questions arising from the community charge reduction scheme. The first concerns some of the most vulnerable and poorest people in the community living in private, multiple-occupation accommodation, who never received a rates bill and always paid their landlords a rent inclusive of rates. In respect of those people, there was no apportionment of rateable value between one part of the property and another.

One bit of unfinished business left by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) concerns the question whether those people ever had their rent reduced when they began to pay poll tax. Many of them had no rent reduction at all and now they do not have a rate base upon which to claim under the community charge reduction scheme. Will the Minister consider whether the scheme can be widened to cover those people who have already been penalised once because they had to pay rates as an inclusive part of their rent and did not receive a rebate from their landlord when the rates were abolished?

The Secretary of State and a number of other Conservative Members spent some time drawing attention to the wide variations in poll tax as between one borough and another—a variation that certainly applies as between Wandsworth and Lambeth. They do not seem fully to have understood the multiplier principle that is at work with the poll tax.

Let me give the House an illustration. Imagine that four people contribute to a kitty for a round of drinks. Suppose that the Minister and the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who is sitting behind him, represent the Government in that party of four. I draw that analogy because the Government pay about 50 per cent. of many local authorities' costs. Suppose that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) is the business man in the group. I say that because, under the uniform business rate, business men typically pay about 25 per cent. of local authority costs. I am the poll tax payer—also responsible for 25 per cent. The four of us put a total of £4 into the kitty and I buy the drinks. I go up to the counter to buy what I expect to be £4 of drinks and the round comes to £4·40.

Under the kitty principle that used to apply under the old rating system—both with business rates and, more so, with equalisation in London—I could have gone back to my mates and said, "The round cost a bit more than you put in the kitty; I want an extra 10p from each of you," and they would have provided me with the money. Under the new local government finance system, the kitty principle no longer applies. That means that the poll tax-paying member of the group of four has to bear all the extra cost of the round. Although the extra cost of the drinks is only 10 per cent., it adds 40 per cent. to my bill. That is exactly what happens when there is a variation in expenditure and a variation in service between one local authority and another.

The example that I have given is typical of the sort of arrangements that apply to the sharing of the burden of expenditure in local government. If poll tax payers want the quality of their services to be increased by 1 per cent. —entailing an extra 1 per cent. in cost—the cost to them is an extra 4 per cent. If they want the cost of their services to be increased by 10 per cent., the cost to them is 40 per cent.

There is a converse side to the argument. The London borough of Wandsworth is favoured. It is receiving almost £20 million of special area relief in the current year. Proportionately, it also receives a large amount of external grant, and only about one sixth or one seventh of its expenditure is met by the poll tax payer. That is quite a small proportion compared with other boroughs.

Mr. Bowis: Of course it is, because, by efficiency savings, Wandsworth has been able to keep the charge low. If one keeps the charge low, it will be a smaller proportion of the total. That is mathematically simple. Nevertheless, Wandsworth has received less in external support from the taxpayer and business rate payer than has Lambeth.

Mr. Fraser: What the hon. Gentleman is saying and what I am saying are both true. Wandsworth can raid its balances and take out £25 million, thus reducing its poll tax by £150. If it then gets £20 million of special area support grant—one item of external support—of which Lambeth gets virtually nothing, the poll tax is reduced by £90 to £100 per poll tax payer. This year, Wandsworth has

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realised that the converse of what I have been saying is also true and that, where the poll tax share of the burden is relatively small, one can reduce the poll tax by 7 per cent. for every 1 per cent. by which one reduces expenditure.

Both trends are in operation at the moment. Some local authorities are particularly mean; I happen to think that Wandsworth is now one of them. It is achieving large savings in the poll tax as a result of relatively small percentage cuts in expenditure. But if a council wants to improve services, the cost to the poll tax payer becomes very heavy.

I want to return to Lambeth council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Good idea."] I do not represent Lambeth council; I represent my electors. We should remember that none of us here represents local authorities.

I have the dubious distinction of being the Member of Parliament who, on the Government's own forecasts, will have the highest poll tax in the world. I say that because only one other country had the poll tax and that was Papua New Guinea, where it proved rather unsuccessful and was abolished. I ought to be in "The Guinness Book of Records" because the prospective poll tax in my area is the highest in the world—£546, according to the Government's forecast figure for the assumed personal charge, Strangely, that is exactly the level of poll tax forecast by the Government three years ago, before the Local Government Finance Act 1988 completed its passage through the House.

Whatever may be said about the expansion of expenditure in my borough, it cannot explain the figure. As the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) pointed out, it is twice as high as the average level of rates used to be. That does not show that there is something wrong with Lambeth council, although there may be a few things wrong with it; the main fault lies with those who introduced the poll tax which had the effect of, on average, doubling the burden per head of the population in my borough.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman generously said that there might be something wrong with Lambeth council. Will he comment on the district auditor's report in October last year which, among other things, said:

"Lambeth operates in an ethos of crisis management rather than one of forward planning, with little obvious thought or vision of where it wants to be in three, five or ten years' time, and no strategy of getting there."?

Is not that an accurate description of Lambeth council —an appalling level of services which are getting worse, charging a high community charge and not really caring about the quality of service that it provides?

Mr. Fraser: Various comments have been made, and that might be an understatement compared with others that one hears. I want to come to exactly that point about Lambeth's financial problems and, in particular, those of its treasurer's department.

The Government's assumed poll tax level means an enormous impoverishment of the second most deprived borough in the country. It means that £94 million a year gross is being taken out of the pockets of poll taxpayers in my borough, compared with £34 million in Wandsworth, £54 million in Lewisham and £58 million in Southwark —all comparable boroughs, except that, of the four, mine is the most deprived.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fraser: I shall give way only once more.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is advising the House of the difficult position in which Lambeth finds itself. Was that decision improved by the decision last December to spend £42,000 on a stretch limousine for its mayor—a decision which even the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) described as incredible?

Mr. Fraser: That is not a decision which I would have made. However, as I say, I am here to represent my electors, not to argue the case for my local authority. As always, I shall look at the matter overall in an objective way. I am not here to put forward a special defence for my local authority.

There is something fundamentally wrong with a tax that can double the average burden on people in the second most deprived borough in the country. Let me give some idea of the variation of deprivation in London alone. In two postal districts in Lambeth, SW2 and SW9—the focal points of riots on two occasions—unemployment is greater than all the unemployment in many of the outer London boroughs. That is one measure of our deprivation. Another measure is the fact that, according to the Government's figures, of the 172,000 poll tax payers in Lambeth, 80,000 have so far applied for a rebate. That must mean that more than half the people living in my borough are on the poverty line, and also having to pay a high poll tax.

The result is that the borough's financial institutions are beginning to break down entirely. It is about five years since my borough had any unqualified audited accounts. The books have not been closed off since 1985. People have often had to wait not months but years for their rebates to be calculated. People who have come to see me have had to wait for between four and six years for their rate demand with the rebate on it.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fraser: I will not give way again. The hon. Gentleman must use his central office material in a pamphlet somewhere.

Lambeth has rent and rates arrears of £56 million—an average debt in rent and rates of £326 per poll tax payer. In other words, the level of rent and rates arrears in Lambeth is greater than some people's poll tax. Those are figures which the Government use as a sign of inefficiency and inadequacy in my borough. I do not deny that there are some elements of inefficiency there, but——

Mr. Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fraser: No, central office must wait, not me.

There are other elements at work. One, to which I have averted already, is the poverty of the population in Lambeth. If half one's population is applying for rent and poll tax rebates—rate rebates in the past—of course the system begins to break down. But it is worse than that. The change in the population is enormous. According to the election register, in many wards the change in the population measured in two snapshots, one year after another, amounts to between 15 and 25 per cent. The family practitioner committee's statistics of the change in the population amounts to about 35 per cent. a year. Some

figures put the change in population even higher than that. When high levels of poverty, unemployment and mobility of population occur together, along with constant changes in the calculation of rebates and the way in which the poll tax is calculated—for example, the new charge reduction system—the financial system begins to break down.

Two things are apparent. One is that the people whom I represent cannot afford this system, and the other is that the local authority's administrative system cannot cope with it either. There are many signs that that is so. One of the greatest is that arrears still amount to 50 per cent., despite the fact that we are almost 10 months into the financial year. The level of poll tax and the complications of rebate, coupled with the other social factors that I have illustrated, mean that the system is partly breaking down and the situation may get worse.

Today we are supposed to have some relief. At the end of the year in which we had rates, the average burden on the population, in an authority which was supposed to be an overspender, was £250 per person per year. Then we had the poll tax which was supposed to make local authorities more accountable and efficient. The burden in the first year after capping was £522 per person per year. Now, because of the level of arrears and the low level of collection in my borough, the forecast level of poll tax for next year, after all the reliefs, safety nets and the rest, will be £546 a year. The Secretary of State—the gymnast on the Front Bench—has done a few somersaults and we find ourselves in a worse position than when we started.

What will be the consequences of all this? The social stability of a place such as Lambeth is always fairly fragile, but there is a great danger that in Lambeth it will break down altogether, particularly if a large number of poor young people are pursued through the courts, possibly even to prison. We are beginning to see the breakdown of the administrative and financial systems and the even greater breakdown of the social structure.

Despite all the help that is supposed to have been given to us, there will be cuts in council services next year. That has to be the case. We were poll tax-capped in the current year—a figure of £287 million—and the maximum amount by which we can increase our expenditure next year is 7 per cent. If the rate of inflation for local authorities runs at around 10 per cent. and expenditure can be increased by 7 per cent., that means a cut of about 3 per cent. Therefore, instability and costs will increase, but the quality of the services will deteriorate.

I want to see the reports scrapped and redrawn so that they will fulfil the short-term, temporary objectives originally presented by the Secretary of State. Otherwise, my constituents will be worse off. I endorse the demand made by the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) to scrap the 20 per cent. payment made by the poorest and the disabled in the community, which would eliminate 20 or 30 per cent. of the collections and simplify the administration, even though that may sound like a defence of the poll tax—but my previous point deals with that. In that way, those who are receiving income support and who are otherwise very poor will not have to pay poll tax. The long-term aim must be to scrap the poll tax altogether.

7.30 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): My hon. Friend the Minister may find it significant that Opposition Members have twice referred to Warwickshire and to the difficulty in which it finds itself.

I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and his departmental colleagues for the considerable courtesy that they have shown to me and others of my hon. Friends who represent Warwickshire constituencies. My hon. Friend the Minister welcomed a delegation from Warwickshire and had meetings with me and other Warwickshire Members of Parliament, at which we sought to persuade him of the problems confronting our county. I am grateful for the sympathy that he has shown in respect of Warwickshire's difficult situation.

I shall argue a narrow case this evening. It is difficult to separate the community charge from revenue support grant, since community charge levels will clearly depend on Government support. The standard spending assessment is a blunt instrument. It is national in its impact, but apparently makes no provision for the fine tuning that is necessary to right the obvious injustices that arise in its application.

This year, local authorities will spend in aggregate £39 billion, which is a substantial increase of about 19 per cent. over 1990-91. Although it is difficult to fault the global package, which is generous, criticism can justifiably be levelled at the way in which individual counties will be affected.

The impartial Audit Commission grouped counties into families, and when Warwickshire is compared with other counties in the same family group, anomalies immediately manifest themselves. Warwickshire, for example, receives revenue support grant of £101 per charge payer, yet the corresponding figures for Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire, which are in the same family, are £198 and £254—twice as much and two and a half times as much respectively. There is obviously something wrong with a formula that throws up such grotesque differences between similar counties.

Warwickshire receives less grant per head than any other county, except perhaps stockbroker Surrey. If my county had received only the average for the family in which the Audit Commission grouped it, the county's grant would have been £60 more per charge payer and the resultant community charge £60 less, which emphasises the indefensible differences produced by the SSA formula.

In a conversation with the county treasurer on 25 January, he advised me that Warwickshire's SSA for 1991-92 is only 6 per cent. above the 1990-91 precept, at a time when inflation is running in excess of 9 per cent. He reminded me that the interim advisory committee's pay award for teachers will be something between 8 per cent. and 10·1 per cent. Under the Edmund Davies formula, the police award will be about 9·75 per cent. With the best will in the world, Warwickshire cannot provide the same level of service as other counties at a similar cost to the charge payer, unless it receives about the same Government support. As I have shown, Warwickshire's grant is far from being the same as that for similar counties.

In the 1970s, I was a member of Warwickshire county council, and I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that it is not a spendthrift local authority that treats charge payers or their money irresponsibly. The reverse is true, as

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is borne out by a letter that I received from the leader of the county council, in which he informs me that the fire service SSA has been set at 31 per cent. below the level acceptable to Her Majesty's inspectorate. That emphasises the extent of the errors produced by a formula, which may be in tune with the majority of counties, but is sounding increasingly discordant in my own.

Warwickshire's police SSA has been set at 11 per cent. below the authority's estimated cost for 1991-92. If it is to operate within the financial constraints that have been imposed, the authority may have to reduce the number of policemen on the beat, just at a time when the county has received an increase in its force establishment. In other words, the Home Office sees a need to add to the number of police officers in Warwickshire, but the all-powerful SSA disagrees. That seems to be a case of the Department of the Environment knowing more about operational police requirements than the Home Office.

I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, take his place on the beat—*[Laughter.]* I meant to say, on the Bench. That was a Freudian slip. In any event, I am pleased that my right hon. Friend is present to hear my remarks about police SSAs. I do not doubt that he will make representations to his ministerial colleagues in the Department of the Environment about the difficulty in which Warwickshire will be if it is unable to fund the increase in police establishment that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have made available to it. When two Government Departments disagree to such a marked extent, something is obviously hopelessly wrong.

Mr. Illsley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the effect of insufficient SSAs on the police and fire services. The norm established by the Department of the Environment is totally at odds with Home Office recommendations in respect of most local authorities. The sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman accord absolutely with those that my right hon. and hon. Friends have been expressing for the past year.

Mr. Pawsey: Perhaps this is the first and last time that the hon. Gentleman and I will find ourselves in some measure of agreement. In due course, I look forward to being again in cheerful disagreement with him, and I hope that it will not be too long. I give way to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to call me his hon. Friend. We certainly agree with one another when we are in an important Committee, and we usually back one another up on the problems that come to that Committee. But the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself for speaking as he has tonight for the simple reason that although he is now complaining about the poll tax and standard spending assessments, he has been in the Ayes Lobby and has voted for it on every occasion. Now he is moaning and groaning. We told them time and time again that they were wrong and now it is all coming out.

Mr. Pawsey: I have substantial respect for the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), but he made a grievous error. When the community charge was introduced in this place in January last year, I was one of those hon. Members who voted against. The hon. Gentleman is normally pretty certain of his facts—that certainly is the case in the Committee on which we both serve—but in this instance I must tell him as straight and plain as I can that he is wrong. Perhaps he might even withdraw the comment. I shall give him the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Haynes: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I should have checked the voting record in *Hansard*. However, the hon. Gentleman referred to one vote. He has voted in favour ever since.

Mr. Pawsey: It is difficult to take the hon. Gentleman seriously after that. I am grateful to receive his apology. Conservative Members would expect nothing less, as his courtesy and chivalry are well known.

The hon. Members for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) both referred to the problems being experienced by Warwickshire, specifically in nursery education. So far, I have referred only to the police and fire service, which are clearly affected. However, the education service also has to face up to the need to make major savings. The county council has decided that it will have to look to the non-statutory area of education and especially nursery education. In the four days since Friday last week, I have received more than 100 letters from my constituents, all objecting to the proposed savings that the county wishes to make in its nursery facilities.

I share the views of the overwhelming majority of my constituents who have written to advise me of their concerns. I am the chairman of the Conservative party education committee in the House, and I acknowledge the importance of education and nursery education. I deeply regret the fact that my county council is reduced to having to try to stay within its standard spending assessment by substantially cutting nursery education.

The formula is full of contradictions. For example, it is assumed within the magic SSA that Warwickshire will receive about £6·7 million in interest from receipts. But because it has consistently followed guidelines issued by the present Government, it has spent its reserves, with the result that the total interest from receipts will be only £2·2 million—a shortfall of about £4·5 million in that one instance.

I have not the slightest doubt that both the guidelines and the formula for the SSA have been carefully worked out on the Department's computer and I acknowledge the fact that it seeks to accommodate a wide range of differing local authorities—the good, the bad and the Labour-controlled—but Warwickshire is treated unjustly by the SSA. More to the point, despite the substantial number of representations that I and my hon. Friends in Warwickshire have made, it is evidently impossible either to control or amend the formula. Apparently, it has been hewn upon some tablet of stone that is kept in the Department of the Environment and is outside any further human considerations.

Apparently there is no presiding human presence able to rectify the anomalies, with the result that my constituents, and those living elsewhere in Warwickshire, will be unfairly treated when compared with people living in neighbouring local authorities.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: Yes, I shall give way to my hon. Friend, who is a fellow Member of Parliament for Warwickshire.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I share his concerns, especially about the proposal that nursery education in the county might suffer badly. Does he agree that there is a further problem with the formula in that having used it last year, when Warwickshire's proportion of the grant was extremely small and caused difficulties, it is continued and accentuated this year on the same basis? Once one is in a bad way, one's position gets worse.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend is right. He comes to the House with substantial experience in local government and he has served his constituents well. I can tell my hon. Friend the Minister who will reply to the debate that my hon. Friend is a well-known, hard-working constituency Member of Parliament. I willingly pay him that tribute and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to listen to him with care.

My argument is that the difficulties facing Warwickshire are not due to local authority profligacy, or to councillors' stupidity, but solely to a rigid inflexible formula. For those reasons, and until a fairer formula is produced—one which does not discriminate against one county—I shall reluctantly vote against the reports at 10 o'clock.

Revenue support grant for Warwickshire is inadequate and a positive change is undoubtedly needed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, for whom I have the utmost respect—I say that with all the sincerity that I can summon—will recognise that. Given the opportunity, I believe that he would recognise the anomalies in the formula and would remedy them. Therefore, I urge him to hold out some hope in his summing up that we shall see an improvement in Warwickshire's SSA and to change the formula that is causing so much difficulty and pain to my constituents and to other people living in Warwickshire.

7.40 pm

Mr. Joe Benton (Bootle): I listened with great interest to the Secretary of State's opening remarks. Straight away, I must admit to great disappointment at the contents of his remarks. I speak with some experience of local government. Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I was in local government for 20 years. Recognising the present dilemma for local government, I am profoundly disappointed at the Secretary of State's comments. I am well aware of differing views on the poll tax, but the Secretary of State's speech did not do anything to recognise how the review will approach the problem. He made no reference whatsoever to injustices—for example, to low-income families and the unemployed, who have to pay 20 per cent.

Again because of my experience in local government, I recognise that there will always be difficulty and debate over how local government is funded. That has been the case for 20 years, and, no matter what alternatives are produced, they will never satisfy everyone.

Throughout today's debate, hon. Members, mostly Conservative, have criticised the "profligacy" of some authorities, reminding us constantly that the point at issue is the use of resources. I am prepared to accept the importance of that. My local authority, Sefton borough council, would be called mean by some; I prefer to call it stringent and careful. I am sure that, if the Secretary of State were present, he would say that Sefton was well known to him, for its spending practices have earned the praise of several Conservative Secretaries of State of the Environment in the past.

I joined the authority in 1974. At the time, it was Tory-controlled, and it remained so until three or four years ago. I assure the House that, throughout the ramifications of budget planning, there was no mention of growth; the word was always "cuts". It is to the credit of Sefton council that, whichever party was in power, it always obeyed the mandates, diktats and guidance of national Government in regard to spending.

I agree with the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) that resources are not contained in a bottomless pit, but there is a distinct difference between monitoring authorities' spending and putting authorities in a straitjacket.

Having consistently exercised prudence, Sefton must now make cuts amounting to £10 million in next year's budget. It cannot even stand still, or it will be poll tax-capped. For an authority that has played fair all along the line, that is a terrible dilemma; I hope that the Minister will be able to advise me, and advise Sefton, how it can be dealt with. One of the main problems is the fact that £5 million must be cut from the education budget, which badly needs the money. I know that many other authorities face similar difficulties.

The problems of the police force have already been mentioned. For the first time, the crime rate on Merseyside has fallen. How do the Government propose to reward its police force? By taking 100 policemen off the beat: their measures will undoubtedly affect recruitment.

Will the Minister tell us how Sefton can impose those cuts without depriving the public of services? As I have said, I realise that it will always be difficult to finance local government, but I appeal to Ministers to consider the injustices of the poll tax when conducting their review. The legislation should never have been on the statute book in the first place; it should now be repealed, and replaced by the Labour alternative.

7.45 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): As some hon. Members have already pointed out, this debate is an annual event. It give us the opportunity to make a number of points about local government, often based on experience: the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton), for instance, made some very serious comments that related to his long experience in local government, including some specific references to the authority that he had served. As he said—and as any hon. Member who has served in local government, and has tried to wrestle with the attendant problems, will know—there are no easy answers.

I only wish that the opening speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) had been equally straightforward. Once again, the hon. Gentleman adopted the "magic wand" approach: a Labour Government would get rid of all the problems, the annual settlement would no longer be necessary, and local authorities would somehow have plenty of money to spend. That simply is not true. It has not been true since Anthony Crosland told local councils, Labour as well as Conservative, that the party was over.

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

Moreover, it was not a Conservative Secretary of State who first embarked on the Government's present course to prevent profligate councils from milking the central Exchequer—of robbing other councils; we all know that that used to happen. It was the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) who changed the system, and he was right to do so. What is more, whatever Opposition Members may say to pacify their friends in local government, a Labour Administration would not change the system, and they know it. If they were honest, they would say so now.

No one can doubt that this is a good settlement for local government. The TSS—total standard spending—for 1991-92 has been set at £39 billion, 19 per cent. higher than that for 1990-91 and 7 per cent. higher than this year's budgets. Why the difference between the figures? Far too many local authorities, between setting their budgets and receiving the outturn figures, lost control of their expenditure—that is, they did not bother to control central Exchequer expenditure. They also agreed to wage rises that they knew could not be afforded. Should the Government pay? No: it is for local authorities to control their own expenditure in a way that is possible for them; and they can control what the Whitley councils decide to award the various categories of local authority staff.

It might be assumed from the stories related by Opposition Members that enormous cuts in council spending had been made——

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman's remarks may lead to confusion. He should make it clear that some wage settlements result from national agreements to which local authorities must then adhere. Some of those agreements —those relating to the fire service and the police, for instance—are entirely out of the control of local authority negotiating powers. Is the hon. Gentleman exhorting authorities to contravene such agreements?

Mr. Hughes: Characteristically, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Local authorities are bound to comply with national agreements—those relating to the police and the fire brigades, for example. However, some national agreements—the Whitley council agreements—are entirely of the local authorities' own making. Local authorities collectively reached a decision about what they would pay. Some of those agreements have led to exorbitant levels of pay. I do not believe that local authorities should be party to national agreements that involve their own staff. However, the hon. Gentleman was right to point to the fact that there are two categories.

Local authority spending during the last two years has increased by 25 per cent. That does not reflect enormous local authority spending cuts. My experience of local government, and considering it in a broader context since I became a Member of Parliament, is that it is good at maintaining services that it has traditionally provided and ensuring that there are sufficient staff to provide them. However, local government never considers the services that it may need to provide in the future. Moreover, it never looks at services where they might be able to make enormous savings.

Local authorities ought to introduce modern management methods. Some of them would reflect what is done in the private sector. They ought to ask themselves whether they are able to provide better services than anyone else, or whether they ought to contract them out to others. In some cases, they will have to take a difficult decision. However, contracting out those services would often lead to better services. When contracts have been put out to tender and bids lower than the local authority price have been received, the result has often been much better services and greater control over their delivery and the amount of money that is needed to provide them.

The Government have rightly announced that, next year, local authorities will have much less discretion over the multipliers that they can use for the standard charge. I welcome that announcement. It is unfortunate, however, that local authorities failed to use sensibly the discretion that was granted to them.

I should have preferred local authorities to retain their discretion. However, when property has been left empty —I refer to empty granny flats, to someone moving home or to an elderly person going into sheltered accommodation—that notional second property has been charged twice the standard charge. That is both unreasonable and wrong. However, the local authorities have been inflexible. I do not welcome the removal of local authority discretion but local government has brought it upon itself.

When flats over business premises, which are difficult to let, are left empty, the multiplier has been limited. Many companies have not tried hard enough, however, to let them. We are talking about thousands and thousands of empty properties, many of which are to be found in areas of great housing need. They could and should be brought into use but they are not, for two reasons. First, businesses find it a nuisance to let them. Secondly, they did not have to pay very much for those properties. Until the introduction of the uniform business rate, they were not rated separately.

Whatever may be right or wrong about the uniform business rate, the fact that businesses now realise that an asset that they have had for some time is valuable and needs to be rented out is important to those of us who care about housing. Unfortunately, the Government say that they intend to impose a maximum multiplier of one. I should impose a maximum multiplier of three, four or even five in order to concentrate people's minds on the fact that such properties represent a community asset that ought to be brought back into use. Only in that one narrow instance would I wish the multiplier to be increased so that those valuable properties can be brought back into use.

A problem relating to the uniform business rate was aired at question time today by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). He referred to the slightly embarrassing saga of York Conservative club, which has gone bankrupt—according to the hon. Member, because of the uniform business rate. The revaluation of sports clubs has created a problem. Some local authorities will make no reduction for sports clubs. They have to pay the full uniform business rate. Many of those clubs will have to close, thereby depriving the community of the many valuable services that they provide. I refer to cricket clubs and football clubs and to a particular bowls club in Harrow.

They have not asked the Government or their local authority for money. Nevertheless, they want their contribution to the community to be recognised in the form of a reduction in the uniform business rate. If local authorities will not reduce it willingly, the Government

ought to ensure that they do. If the uniform business rate is not reduced, it may lead to serious problems for communities.

It is important that people should understand what the Labour party's plans are for the Audit Commission. Each month it has announced different plans. In October, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that he would sweep the Audit Commission away. In November, he told the *Financial Times* that its days were numbered. Today, his hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham told the House that he would keep the Audit Commission—although, when pressed, he said that he would emasculate it.

Mr. Blunkett: I reiterate what I said to the Statutory Instruments Committee that considered the Audit Commission's code of practice: that the Labour party would subsume the Audit Commission into the Quality Commission. Its audit powers would continue. I do not intend to go over ground that has not been ploughed by us but that has been vigorously ploughed by the Government, who have used it as a smoke screen. They never talk about quality.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having confirmed that he wishes to subsume, as he puts it, the Audit Commission and to emasculate its powers. He does not mind it auditing the books of local authorities, but heaven forbid that it should make comparisons about value for money as between one local authority and another.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a most important matter, and, if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall seek to dwell upon it. The fact that we have had an effective Audit Commission for the last eight years has led to enormous gains. If the proposals enshrined in the Opposition's consultative document were to be implemented, they would emasculate and remove all the benefits of having an Audit Commission. As it is a consultative document, will my hon. Friend join me in urging the hon. Gentleman, who is to wind up for the Opposition, not to proceed with it?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is right. Anyone who doubts the value of the Audit Commission's work should read the Adjournment debate initiated last week by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell). My hon. Friend set out clearly much of the enormously valuable work that has been done by the Audit Commission. I can understand why the Labour party may not welcome its work. It does not go along with its political prejudices, and it has criticised many Labour councils. The reality is that it has done extremely important work and councils would be poorer without its advice.

The Labour party says that it would get rid of capping, which it says is an infringement of local democracy. In this financial year, 4 million people have saved between £26 and £99 each as a result of capping. I do not think that they would thank the Labour party for getting rid of it. The Labour party knows that it cannot control the excesses of some of the councils. It knows that some councils will milk as much as possible from every charge payer or ratepayer or whatever the system may be. By getting rid of capping, the Labour party would be removing protection for ordinary people.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman talks of the benefits of capping being between £26 and £99. Can he tell us why the Government will not allow the electorate to vote for a particular authority that sets a certain poll tax level? Where is the accountability that was supposedly built into the poll tax when the Government are prescribing standard spending assessments, budget levels and poll tax levels?

Mr. Hughes: That is an interesting suggestion, and I look forward to seeing it in the next Labour party manifesto. I suspect that it will not be there, and I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) is making an entirely serious suggestion. It might be his view, and I will be interested to hear more later.

Competitive tendering has saved local authorities about £3 billion a year. It is clear from what is said that the Labour party would do everything possible to disrupt or get rid of competitive tendering. About a year ago, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said:

> "A future Labour Government will relieve local authorities of going out to compulsory competitive tender across a whole range of services."

That is no surprise to those of us who served on the Committee considering the Local Government Bill. It was clear that the Labour party did not care about value for money. It wanted local councils to keep control of everything, whether they were providing a good service or not, and that is typical of the Labour party's policy.

The Labour party needs to answer two questions, and I hope that the hon. Member for Brightside will be able to answer them tonight. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) announced the £3 billion increase in external finance for local authorities next year, the hon. Member for Brightside called it peanuts. In December, he called for a 50 per cent. increase.

If the hon. Gentleman is being honest, he should tell us the answer to one precise question: what level of extra funding would a Labour Government make available to local authorities? That is a simple question. I also want the hon. Gentleman to assure the House that the promise of more money, at whatever level, will not mean an increase in the standard rate of income tax or the overall tax burden. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants to answer that point now.

Mr. Blunkett: I should be delighted to give as my answer a simple riposte. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell me how much the £1·2 billion announced by the Secretary of State last week will add to income tax, VAT or cuts in other expenditure.

Mr. Hughes: We recognise that that is part of the taxation pattern. The £1·2 billion is getting on for 1p on income tax. We know that. However, the hon. Member for Brightside called £3 billion, in excess of 2p on income tax, peanuts. If he thinks that that is not enough spending, how much does he want to spend? I shall ask him once again whether he can give an assurance that it will not add to the general level of taxation or the level of income tax. Is the answer yes or no? If he cannot answer it now, perhaps he will do so in his reply.

The reality is that the Labour party is shy of linking one with the other, whereas we recognise that any spending commitment has a taxation commitment as well—

[Mr. Hughes]

[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for Brightside wants to intervene, I am happy to give way. If he mumbles from a sedentary position, it is difficult to respond.

The Labour party has an appalling record in local government and that can be illustrated by two things. First, if one looks at the level of non-collection of rent and rates in London boroughs, one will see that the Labour party leads the field. How can one of the Lambeth Members of Parliament complain in the debate about the level of funding to his borough when, in that borough in the year to 31 March 1989, there was £17·49 million of uncollected rents and £33·2 million of uncollected rates? Every penny of that could be spent on services in that borough, but the authority cannot be bothered to collect it. That is the case not only across London but in many Labour authorities up and down the country.

As has already been said, if Labour councils kept fewer properties empty, they could solve the homelessness and economic problems in their areas. Manchester has over 6,000 vacant dwellings, Liverpool has nearly 6,000, Sheffield has 3,400, Salford has 2,500, Birmingham has 2,400, Sandwell has 2,300 and Hackney has 2,100. The one thing that binds those authorities is that they are all controlled by the Labour party—a party that would rather whinge about the level of funding than collect its rents or rates or fill the property it owns.

It is important for the future of local government that local authorities, irrespective of who controls them, should be looking constantly at value for money. It is not enough to come along to the debate or to say to local people, "We run efficient services," merely on the basis that they think they do.

It is my experience that local councillors, irrespective of party, have insufficient information about the central bureaucracy of the council in which they serve and the way in which large sums of money are spent or about the most up-to-date practices of management that could often save a great deal of money for local authorities that could and should be used on other services. Almost all local authorities need to look carefully at the management services, the way they manage contracts or direct services and how those services are delivered to see whether they can achieve better value for money.

I want to talk about the long horizon that has been mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Dagenham and others. There have been a number of local government reorganisations, most of which, in my judgment, have not been very successful. It is no secret that I was not keen on the reorganisation that led to the abolition of the Greater London council. I do not want us once again to bring forward a reorganisation package that is ill thought out because we have not considered what services we want local authorities to provide.

We must seriously consider, and if possible on a cross-party basis, the services that are provided by local councils. What do we want them to do? At what level should they operate? What services are better operated by them and what can best be done by Government? If we do that, perhaps we shall find genuine solutions to the fundamental questions that we all air in these debates. I will not be happy with the reorganisation package unless I feel that those fundamental questions have been answered.

8.20 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I noted the words that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) used earlier. He said: "Labour will not change the system." I have news for him: Labour is committed to changing the system by abolishing the poll tax. He will find that in the next Labour manifesto. The Conservative party and the Secretary of State made noises about changing the system, but they are hedging, delaying and back-tracking on abolishing the poll tax, which, as everyone knows, is iniquitous and massively unpopular.

Sometimes I think that the Alan B'Stard tendency in the Tory party have set its policies on local government. Those Tory Members have glorified the callous effects of the cuts that they have imposed on local authorities. We have today heard Conservative Member after Conservative Member from that Alan B'Stard tendency.

Poll tax capping is enforcing a renewed rundown of local authority services, despite higher bills for poll tax payers. In the London borough of Waltham Forest, the fear of poll tax capping has forced cuts next year of 5 per cent., which will affect social services, housing repairs, rents and education. The number of secondary school teachers will be reduced, despite many teacher vacancies. The Government are responsible for that. Traditionally, the borough has offered better public services than its neighbours, especially for the needy, in education and in provision for the elderly, but it is being punished for doing so.

The system is still unfair. Poll tax payers in Waltham Forest had to give £42 as a direct handout to Wandsworth and other boroughs. Wandsworth is getting that money and much more under the extra grant system, whereas Waltham Forest gets nothing. If it did, the poll tax would be less than £200.

The leader of Basildon council, Peter Ballard, has contacted me out of desperation because he cannot get Basildon's voice heard in the House. The two Conservative Members of Parliament for the area have repeatedly ignored Basildon's local government needs. Basildon and Southend are similar boroughs in Essex. One is a new town and one is an old-established area, but they are similar in many ways.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cohen: Is it on Basildon?

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I hope that he observed the normal courtesies of the House and advised my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) that he would be raising this matter. Conservative Members know that my hon. Friend is an outstanding advocate for Basildon and an extemely good Member of Parliament.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman has not heard my case yet, but I have given notice to both hon. Members who represent the area, and they have chosen not to be here.

Basildon's standard spending assessment is £12·1 million, whereas Southend's is £17·8 million. Basildon receives Government grant of £18·4 million whereas

Southend receives £24·3 million—almost £6 million more. The populations of both towns is almost the same: Basildon's is 120,000 and Southend's is 123,000. The Government cut Basildon's grant by 5 per cent. this year but increased Southend's by 1 per cent. The SSA per person in Basildon is £100, but in Southend it is £144—44 per cent. more. The revenue support grant is £153 per person in Basildon, but £179 in Southend, almost 29 per cent. more.

Local Members of Parliament have let those facts go unchallenged. There has been not a word about that, and no fight for Basildon in the House. If Basildon received the same grant as Southend, Basildon's poll tax payers would be £50 better off.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend may recall debates last year on poll tax capping, when hon. Members representing the Basildon area lamented the fact that Basildon had not been capped.

Mr. Cohen: That is right. Certainly one of those hon. Members has been eager for capping and has virtually urged the Government to cap the council.

The council has written twice to the Secretary of State asking for a meeting to discuss those issues and the unfair way in which Basildon is treated, but it has twice been refused a meeting. It wrote to the local Members of Parliament, but they ignored its call for help.

Basildon council has been capped at £23·7 million, a poll tax of £443, when it budgeted for £27·9 million, a poll tax of £478—a difference of £35. To reach the capped level, it has had to make £4·6 million of cuts. It has minimised the damage to services by capitalising £3·1 million of interest payments, but it has still had to make £1·5 million of service cuts to get to the capped level. It has had to make a further £2·4 million of cuts to avoid capping for the forthcoming year. That has led to 150 jobs going west.

Basildon needs £18 million just to deliver the statutory duties imposed on it to collect the poll tax and to pay debt charges. New legislation that the Government are imposing will cost another £500,000, and it has redundancy costs to pay which the Government have imposed.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I have been listening carefully to the comparison that the hon. Gentleman has been drawing between Basildon and Southend. Should he not extend the comparison? I wonder whether part of Basildon's problem is that it has failed, whereas Southend has succeeded, in privatising and contracting out many of its services. Is not that the reason why Southend is able to deliver services such as refuse collection so much more efficiently and therefore at a much lower cost than Basildon? The hon. Gentleman should listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) when he urges the same disciplines on Basildon as have been applied to Southend council, because that might solve many of Basildon's problems.

Mr. Cohen: Basildon's services are of a very high quality, whereas Southend is in many ways quite seedy and rundown. The hon. Gentleman cannot deny that. Certainly he did not address the differences in grant levels. Nor did the hon. Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who should be here to take the figures apart. Anyway, Basildon council has to find £18 million to provide basic statutory services.

The fact that the Government's policies have resulted in homelessness has created an extra burden. The number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Basildon has gone up by 3,500 per cent. since 1987, at a cost of over £1 million to poll tax payers—over £8 for every payer. Then we have the investment swaps. Basildon has been successful at that. The decision of the House of Lords could result in Basildon's losing £2 million from its balances, and that amount could go on to the poll tax, which would be unfair. I hope that the Minister will assure us that poll tax payers will not lose as a result of that arrangement and that losses will be accounted for where they should be—at the banks. We need an assurance that, if that is not to happen, the council will be properly compensated.

There have been cuts this year already. All holiday schemes for the elderly and disabled have been stopped; welfare transport and shopping trips for those who are virtually housebound have been reduced; summer holiday play schemes have been cut; green way and verge cutting have been reduced; the cost of the spring clean-up campaign cannot now be met. The hon. Member for Basildon was one of those who boasted about how clean Basildon is.

Then there are environmental health cuts, cuts in welfare rights advice, the closure of six sports centres and swimming pools for an extra day, and an increase in fees at swimming pools and recreation centres. Bus passes have been affected, and the value of food vouchers has had to be reduced from £66 to £52. There have been cuts in the repair and maintenance of buildings.

The councillors themselves cannot be blamed for all this. Indeed, they have even demonstrated responsibility by reducing their own allowances in an effort to stay within the figures. It really is down to the Government, yet they boast about poll tax capping. They set the figures, so they are to blame for the cuts that have taken place and the ones that are to follow.

The leader of the Basildon council, Councillor Ballard, tells me that, if it is again capped at £23·7 million, the effects will be disastrous for the people of the district. Major facilities will have to close. Most of the welfare package and the services for elderly people will be lost and the council will have to make hundreds of staff redundant. Basildon has not been fairly represented in the House on that issue.

We are spending about £30 million a day on the war in the Gulf. The cost of the war for one day is greater than Basildon's annual budget. The Government have said that there is not a bottomless pit. For the war,there is indeed a bottomless pit, but the public services to which war victims will come home, and on which they will rely, have been decimated. That applies to Basildon and to other places throughout the country. The Government should be giving Basildon a much fairer deal.

8.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I start by referring to a point that was raised by the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who seemed to chide my hon. Friends and myself for what he referred to as central office propaganda. I do not know whether he imagines that at the bottom of central office there is a machine that churns out untruths about local government, but I can assure him that these matters are based on fact.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

My reason, and that of my hon. Friends, for following so closely what goes on in Lambeth, although that borough is more than 100 miles from where I live, is that it is close to Westminster. It gives us and the electorate some indication of what a Labour Government would be like.

I understand the sensitivity that is displayed when my hon. Friends and I quote what is happening in Lambeth. The facts are truly horrific. When I tell the House that the Labour leader of Lambeth council, Joan Twelves, has refused to pay the community charge, saying that she will put her charge bill "in the bin", my hon. Friends will be truly astonished. Then I can tell them that it is extremely unlikely that the contents of that bin will be collected. In August 1990, Lambeth council received 877 complaints about dustbin collections and 1,138 complaints about street cleaning.

These are very serious matters. They go to the heart of people's perception of the quality of local government and the way in which it is run. The point about Lambeth is very important indeed. It is that Lambeth is an example of places where one finds appalling services, dreadful value for money and completely ineffective management. We raise the subject of Lambeth not only to embarrass the Labour party but because we feel that many of the problems of Lambeth simply must be addressed as soon as possible.

Mr. Battle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is more expensive to live in Harrogate, which has a council that is SLD and Tory hung, than in Leeds, just down the road, which has a very prudent and wise council? We have heard lots of anecdotes about individual boroughs. Would not it be better to address the structural fault, which is the means of assessing the SSA? Some Conservative Members have come to realise that that is the problem we face.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. Many of my hon. Friends, in their comparisons with Wandsworth—an excellently managed borough right next door to Lambeth—have addressed exactly that point. We are not looking at these facts in isolation; we are making exactly the comparison that the hon. Gentleman says we should be making. I am very pleased to be able to correct him on that point.

At the beginning of the debate much play was made of the wide consultation that is taking place about the steps that are needed to reform the community charge. I welcome that wide consultation. The Secretary of State made it clear that it was continuing at local level, at national level and across the political divide, and he once again invited Opposition Front-Bench Members to come and talk to him about the reforms that are necessary.

I urge hon. Members to think carefully before again turning down that suggestion. There is a critical need for wide consensus on any reform of local government and I hope very much that Opposition Members will welcome the proposal that in the spring there should be an interim report making clear what is ruled in and what is ruled out of the community charge review. I hope that, as a result, it will be possible to achieve wide consensus in respect of any reform of local government,, which will have to be attached to reform of the community charge. Many of us feel that a further upheaval for local government will be almost too much for councils to contemplate, but if there is to be more change, let us have the widest possible consensus about it.

I welcome very much the recent announcement about the community charge reduction scheme. I believe that it will direct help towards couples and single people who lost out badly when the community charge was introduced. I think particularly of many of my constituents in Netherfield, who will benefit from the scheme. I am very grateful to the Government for heeding the words of those of us who asked that that particular problem should be addressed.

In any debate on the level of the revenue support grant, it must be said that much extra money has been provided. There has been an increase of 19 per cent., which is way above the level of inflation over the past year. There is £1·7 billion on top, through the community charge reduction scheme, and there is another £4·5 billion in extra money. Those are large sums, and it is greatly to the Government's credit that they have managed to find these sums at this time. However, any scheme that leads to 18 million people receiving some form of benefit must be susceptible to improvement; that is why I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said this afternoon.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that funding had increased by 19 per cent. He will find that the Government have increased the standard spending assessments by 19 per cent.; they have not increased the level of Government funding by that amount. Those are two different figures.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right, but that point was dealt with clearly by my right hon. Friend in his opening speech. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, whatever the basis, there has been a steep increase in funding.

This afternoon, we have dealt with civilising the community charge for the next year and with the major reforms thereafter. Any major reform of local government will now have to take on board the importance of unitary local government. I am a supporter of unitary local government which, if the units are the right size, will ensure that local government is nearer to the people it seeks to represent and will also make accountability, which is so important, that much easier.

When discussing accountability, I want to emphasise the position of my constituents in Gedling, who are fortunate enough to have a prudent and successful local council, which spends below its SSA. However, it is saddled with high expenditure by Nottinghamshire's socialist county council, which spends no less than £80 per head above its SSA. It is extremely important that my constituents should understand why their charge is so high and where the blame for that lies. It lies with Nottinghamshire's socialist county council and not with Gedling's prudent, successful and well-respected borough council.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): For the benefit of Nottinghamshire people, my hon. Friend should reiterate what he has just said. He should also comment on the scandalous suggestion by the profligate Nottinghamshire county council which last year creamed off £65 million of money meant for schools. It now tells everyone in the county that it may be community charge capped and may have to cut the education budget. That is scandalous.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point and I hope that he will be heard by Nottinghamshire county council, which still has, at this late stage, a chance to introduce some of the remedies that my hon. Friend thinks are so important.

The issue of capping has been raised today. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set out clearly what the criteria are, so anyone who is capped is very much a volunteer. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) made the point that capping has led to 4 million people saving up to £99 this year. I hardly think that they will wish to thank the Labour party when it says that capping should not take place. It is also interesting to note that, in spite of the dire warnings from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) about what happens when capping takes place and how meals-on-wheels and other vulnerable and important services are dealt a death blow, that tends not to be the case.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the magazine of the National and Local Government Officers Association called *Public Service*. It has recently carried out a survey of capped authorities. My right hon. Friend referred to the survey and I believe that it is worth further study. It says:

"Brent: No cuts were required as a result of capping . . . Bristol: No redundancies, no cuts in services, no charge increases . . . Calderdale: Holding growth, increasing some charges and cutting some non-essential services . . . Camden: No cuts necessary. Cap was £4·4 million . . . Council said 'Our income was sufficient for us not to need to make cuts'. . . . Greenwich: Some redundancies expected, but no large scale job-cuts.. . . Lambeth: Managed to avoid closure of front line services and no redundancies . . . Rochdale"—

a Liberal authority—

"No compulsory redundancies."

Those are not central office or Government quotations and they have not been manufactured by my hon. Friends. They are quotations from the house magazine of NALGO. I am sure that we shall give them the weight that they deserve.

I draw the attention of the House to the Audit Commission, which has been mentioned several times in our debate. We concentrate very much on input and there has been much bandying of statistics across the Chamber on the level of funding for services. Nevertheless, although we spend on enormous amount of time examining input, we should also spend far more time examining output and value for money. The Audit Commission is not a stick with which to beat local government. It has criticised central Government when, from time to time, they made the job of local authorities that much more difficult. To characterise the commission as having outlived its usefulness, especially in the unlikely event of there being a Labour Government, is a tremendous misunderstanding of what it tries to do. It is easy for the House to undersell the work of the Audit Commission.

I argue that the commission is the single greatest force for good in achieving best value for money in local government expenditure that the Government have introduced. Just under £1·5 billion of savings have been identified by the Audit Commission. Much of its work may seem dry and analytical, but it is of enourmous importance.

I want to cite a couple of the commission's reports. There was the report of "Improving the Performance of the Finger Print Service". The report showed that some finger print bureaux spent six times as much community charge payers' money as others. There are wide variations in effectiveness in terms of the convictions secured through finger print evidence. The figures vary from 75 convictions per officer down to just four convictions per officer. It is a significant report, which has not had enormously wide publicity, but which has shown the Audit Commission at its very best. There are many pointers to the fact that we do not get the best value for money from the police, and the detailed work of the Audit Commission is extremely important.

Another report, which I have plucked at random, is entitled "The Cost of Absence Through Sickness to Local Authorities". It showed that, on average, London boroughs have twice the CBI national average of days lost through sickness. Before the Audit Commission started its investigation, some local authorities did not know what their own levels of absence through sickness were. Lambeth was, rightly, so appalled to learn of its level of sickness that it introduced immediate management changes—which promptly led to a strike. However, at least it was able to make the necessary changes. Brent is losing £8 million a year through sickness.

If local authority sickness in London was at the level of the CBI national average, the community charge per head in London would decline by £25. That clearly shows the merit and value of the survey. We should not lightly dismiss the importance of the work of the Audit Commission. I argue that we should significantly increase its work.

I want to draw the attention of Opposition Members to other important studies. The Audit Commission produced a study on "Building: Direct Labour Organisations". It produced a purchasing study on how local authorities buy goods and services, which has been widely welcomed, and it has also done work on the maintaining and buying of vehicle fleets. Its work on community care has national as well as local importance. It has done work on "The Competitive Council", which is much used by many councils and which identifies eight key factors for assessing success. I urge the House and especially the Opposition to reflect carefully on what the Audit Commission has already achieved and what more it could achieve not only in local government, but in other areas.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) mentioned earlier a document entitled, "Quality Commission:—A Consultation Paper" which was published this month by the Labour party. I note with relief that it is a consultation paper. I very much hope that the Labour party will think carefully before hardening those proposals. There are two positive points in that paper, the first of which is in paragraph 3.4. The paper admits that the Audit Commission brings a certain rigour to the way in which local authorities conduct themselves. Labour Members are to be congratulated on that conclusion. Then why remove the rigour, which is the effect of many proposals in that paper?

The consultation paper also states that a management advisory team can be put into authorities such as Liverpool which are completely out of control. I welcome that sensible measure. Elsewhere, the document is a disaster because it gets rid of value-for-money studies and competitive tendering and invites councils effectively to volunteer for quality audits. That is an absurd proposition. Labour Members have sold out to NALGO, the National Union of Public Employees, and the various local government unions. It would be a terrible mistake if the

[Mr. Mitchell]

Opposition adopted that proposition. I hope that the hon. Member for Brightside, who is in many respects a reasonable person, will think carefully about whether he wishes to pursue it.

The Audit Commission is an independent, external, intrusive, fearless watchdog, not the toothless puppy that the Labour proposals would render it. I urge the hon. Gentleman to consider whether he wishes to proceed with that document.

I hope that the Audit Commission's powers will be extended into public housing, the police, magistrates courts, university finance, and in particular, schools. An article in today's issue of *The Guardian* mentions the report entitled "Management within primary schools" and now looks at tools and ideas to help schools use their new budgetary responsibility. It is an important article, and it deserves to be widely read.

8.50 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Since 1979, we have had as many systems of revenue support for local government as we have had Secretaries of State. One thing that they all have in common is that they are almost incomprehensible to anyone but a few academics and specialist local government officers. We were promised that with the poll tax would come a simpler, more acceptable system. Hon. Members have shown that SSAs are no more acceptable than the GREs before them. Like other hon. Members who have spent much time in local government, I remain unconvinced that the mandarins of Marsham street can work out what is right for every individual local authority to spend, however sophisticated their computer programmes may be.

The only justification that was put forward for the poll tax was that it increased accountability. It could not be defended on the grounds of fairness, justice or efficiency, but it was argued that it would increase the accountability of local authorities to the electorate. It was to do that by reducing the pain threshold and increasing, therefore, the taxpayer's interest in what went on in his local council. It was argued that, in that way, the amount of local council spending could be driven down.

Then there was the rather strange concept of what one might call reverse accountability. The poll tax was to make electors accountable for the spending decisions they took when they cast their votes in local elections. That was to be done by making everybody pay something towards their poll tax, so that no one was insulated or protected from the effects of the spending choices that they made at election times.

The past year has seen the collapse of both approaches. As we know, the poll tax did not result in accountable local government spending—just the reverse. Many local authorities seized the opportunity that was presented by the changeover to jack up their spending and to blame the Government for high poll tax bills. Accountability failed because it was impossible for most poll tax payers to know whether the charges were reasonable. They had no basis on which to compare poll tax bills with previous rate bills. They saw high levels of poll tax all over the country, and it was perfectly natural that they should blame the Government rather than the local authority.

As other hon. Members have pointed out, in any case, capping local authorities totally undermines the concept of local accountability. Maximum spending levels are set by central Government. That must encourage a capped local council to cut high-visibility and essential services and then to put the blame on central Government.

At the other extreme of the accountability argument, I welcome hon. Members' comments about the urgent need to scrap the 20 per cent. poll tax minimum charge. There was never justice in the concept of universal taxation—the idea that everyone, however poor, must pay something towards their poll tax bill. The Government pride themselves on their belief that benefits must be targeted at those most in need. Why should they advance the curious concept that everyone should pay taxes? If benefits should go to those most in need, surely taxes should be paid by those who are best able to pay them. That is what we do with national taxation: because the poor might vote for a high-spending national Government, they must be forced to pay national income tax in some way to deter them from making that decision at an election.

The policy of making even those on income support pay one fifth of the poll tax makes the poorest even poorer. That policy may not create many problems in Bath or Henley, but in constituencies such as Woolwich these are single-parent families on income support and elderly people on state pensions who are already struggling to make ends meet. Making them pay one fifth of their poll tax is simply adding a substantial extra burden and much unnecessary worry. It cannot be right to make such people worse off.

It is a simple fact that the cost of trying to collect large numbers of very small sums is uneconomic. We have heard great praise for the Audit Commission. It is worth remembering that the Audit Commission supported the proposal that the 20 per cent. minimum payment be abolished. It recognised that that would make the task of collection a little less difficult and would reduce the huge administration costs associated with the poll tax. It would also make the system just a little fairer.

We have heard much about the results of capping, so I shall say a word about those results in Greenwich. Greenwich has the doubtful distinction of having been capped ever since capping began. But, as has been said, thus far we have not seen in Greenwich or elsewhere the dramatic cuts that we thought might flow from capping. It is true that a borough such as Greenwich has evaded the worst effects so far by a variety of one-off schemes, creative accounting, the use of balances, and all the rest of the financial juggling to which we have become used in local government. But the chickens, at last, are coming home to roost.

We know that the likely maximum total spending in Greenwich for the next financial year will be £212·95 million. The council's projected spending for that year was £248·2 million, which leaves a spending gap of £35·275 million for the authority—a cut of more than 14 per cent. in the spending programme. Action has already been taken to make cuts of about £20 million, but a further £15 million in cuts must still come.

It is interesting to see where the cuts have fallen. There have been increased charges for home helps, lunch clubs, meals on wheels and other services to the elderly. Perhaps the meanest cut of all is the scrapping of the home bathing service for elderly people who cannot bathe themselves, saving only £36,000 in a full year. The elderly and the

disabled are now limited to one journey a week on the taxi card service. Services for the mentally handicapped have been cut and old people's homes are to be shut.

In contrast, and oddly, the budget for social services central administration is planned to increase by £1·6 million. Oddly, a £90,000 grant to a theatre which is not even in the borough is to continue. The council's newspaper is to continue, at a cost of £120,000 a year plus delivery charges. Now the council is producing a series of coloured leaflets, one for each service area, detailing the cuts that it is making and, of course, blaming the Government for them.

That, it seems to me, demonstrates the weakness of the concept of central control of local council spending. Faced by a crude cap, many councils do not react by asking how they can improve the efficiency of their operations and deliver the same quality of service at lower cost. They take the easy way out, cut spending and blame the Government. That may reduce the total level of spending, but it is no way to provide value for money.

All of us who have had experience of local government and local government finance over the past 20 years or so know that reform of local government finance is a minefield. I suspect that Ministers now bitterly regret the fact that they ever wandered into that minefield. I have lost count over the past 20 years of the number of Government inquiries, unofficial and official studies and reports, Green Papers and White Papers all directed to the problem of how to produce a reasonably fair system of paying for local council services.

It should be obvious by now that if there had been a simple, straightforward solution to this problem, someone would have stumbled on it long ago. It is absolutely clear that the search for an easy solution is like the search for the philosopher's stone or the holy grail. It is an illusion, and, is doomed to failure.

We have to accept, if we are looking for the least bad solution, that any system of local government finance that any of us dreams up will have a number of serious drawbacks and defects. What we are looking for, in my view, is the scheme with the fewest snags. Since Layfield produced his report in 1976, I have been convinced that the most promising—indeed, the only—way forward is that of local income tax. I have heard nothing to change that view since 1976, and certainly the experience of the poll tax over the past 12 months has not changed my belief that local income tax is by far the best way of paying for local services. In my view, the sooner we get on with it the better it will be for the health of our local government system.

9 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Many of us have been looking closely at the idea of a local income tax for some time. The problem is the variation of incomes in different areas. In an area such as mine, which has a low income rate and a low income base, the tax would not supply sufficient money to run local government. So there would also have to be equalisation, grants to offset that and all the other things.

I was disappointed by the Secretary of State, for a number of reasons. He smiles, and rightly so. I was talking to members of the Fire Brigades Union before I came into the Chamber for this debate, and I said that at best we would have a Labour Government who would get rid of the poll tax altogether and at worst a Secretary of State who would get rid of the poll tax anyway.

I should have known better. Two years ago, there was no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman wanted to get rid of the poll tax because he realised exactly what it is—a vote loser. He is no idiot. He knows all about its impact both in the House and outside. Government supporters know exactly what it is, because in recent debates not one hon. Member has spoken in favour of the poll tax.

We should remind Government Members that, when the right hon. Member for Circencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) brought the poll tax to the Floor of the House, with the clear statement that it would clobber local government, they waved their Order Papers to support him in the Chamber, and they supported him also in the Lobby. However, times changed and people realised that they had got hold of a tiger by its tail. So when the Secretary of State said that he wanted to change it, I believed him. I should have known better.

Perhaps there will still be a change of heart and a change in the poll tax. A change is needed; the right hon. Gentleman knows it, the Government know it and Government supporters know it. I see no reason why the Secretary of State should not come right out with the statement that we should get together and find an alternative to the poll tax instead of tinkering about with it, because no tinkering will make any difference and it will be very expensive. Rita Hale of the Corporation of Insurance and Financial Advisers put her finger on this point when she said that the poll tax would become more and more expensive each year.

The Secretary of State quoted Barnsley as having collected 93 per cent. of its poll tax. He should also have examined how much it had cost to collect. it. The chairman and treasurer of Barnsley finance committee said quite openly that it would be cheaper to get rid of the 20 per cent. and not collect it at all, because it is costing more and more to collect. So, if we are talking about efficiency, the first thing that we should do is get rid of the 20 per cent., and we would save money.

People have talked about the poll tax and local government and the facilities provided. Local government is a marvellous, mostly efficient animal which is different in every area. Different areas at different times have different, complex needs which depend on the locality. No one tonight has mentioned the democracy of local government.

The basis of the government of this country is local government. It has evolved in a certain way and we should never forget it. Local government is about local people, the people who elect it and are represented by it, as well as the people elected to carry out the wishes of local people. The poll tax interferes with local democracy, local wishes and local people. Surely it is right that local people decide how much they want to spend and are determined to spend on local services. We have forgotten that in the debate, because we have concentrated on scoring political points. That is wrong. Local government is bigger and worth more than that because it is so important.

The most important aspect of the reports is their effects. The important thing is not how money is raised, but how it is spent on what people need and how money is distributed. Efficiency can be measured in many ways. Let us consider South Yorkshire police authority. The chief constable is extremely worried because the authority has

[Mr. Allen McKay]

the lowest ratio of policemen to population. So the number of policemen should be increased, not reduced. Yet under the present proposals, 120 officers on the beat will be lost. Not only that, but 200 civilians in the force must go. To make up for the latter, 200 policemen must be taken off the beat, so effectively 320 policemen will disappear from an already depleted force. That is not right at a time when the crime rate is rising.

I have taken up the problems of the fire brigades with the Secretary of State on previous occasions. I wish to deal with the consequences of the reports on South Yorkshire fire service. If we are to believe the fire chief, and we should, in 1986 the service lost 67 fire-fighting posts. In 1988 it lost 28 posts and now, because of the poll tax, it is again likely to lose 150 posts. That is a ridiculous position and it cannot and should not be sustained.

The number of firemen is considerably below Home Office recommended numbers. When a delegation recently visited Earl Ferrers, he said that it would be foolish to allow the number of firemen to fall below the Home Office figures. Not only has there been a loss of fire cover and full-time personnel, a failure to retain personnel and a reduction in the number of fire stations, but call-out time has increased from five minutes to eight or perhaps 10 minutes on first and second calls. That is unacceptable and should have been avoided at all costs.

To return to local government itself, a letter from the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities said that under the Government's proposals Barnsley's standard spending assessment would increase by 19·3 per cent. That is slightly higher than the average increase for metropolitan districts. In other words the letter says, "At least we are looking after you." But, taken on a year-on-year basis, the increase is only 2·7 per cent. over the last year. With inflation at 9 per cent., teachers' awards already set at 9 per cent. and other wage increases still to work through, that is an effective cut in local government services—on top of a £10 million cut last year.

The Secretary of State and the Minister of State know exactly what that means in our area, with its low rateable values, low wages and low level of facilities. Nevertheless, it is trying to pull itself out of the mud, and it will, irrespective of the effect of central Government on local government. It means that we have not built a nursery school for five years. The chief education officer told me that, on current prospects, we will not build another, at a time when there should be good nursery provision.

For three years we have been rationalising schools, and schools are now being closed at a rate at which we used to close colleries. Children have been transferred from one school to another; now they have to move again. That is wrong in rural areas where the school may be not just the school but the chapel and the community hall for the village. Because of rationalisation and poll tax capping, authorities have to close schools. That is a direct effect on Government policy.

It is time that the Secretary of State and Minister of State got their act together. When they ask my hon. Friends to co-operate on the poll tax, I hope that my hon. Friends will keep saying no. If the Government say that they will get rid of the poll tax and look for an alternative, I am sure that my hon. Friends will say yes to co-operation.

9.10 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The Secretary of State said that capping was necessary for authorities with excessive budgets. That is a fallacy. Capping is available for authorities whose budgets are above their standard spending assessments. Those authorities are not profligate; they are not high spenders. If we look at the list of authorities which were capped last year, it is easy to see that most of them were reasonable. My authority was capped, yet 250 other authorities had higher poll taxes.

The Secretary of State said that standard spending assessments were based on fair and reasonable criteria. It is a pity that he did not attend the Standing Committee on the Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill, where he would have heard the arguments against the SSAs and the information put forward which showed that they were based on irrelevancies and data taken from the 1981 census. That information is well out of date and in many respects irrelevant. Many of the indicators within the SSAs did not relate to the services provided.

The Secretary of State referred to road lengths being one aspect that was taken into account in setting SSAs. If he came to Barnsley, where roads have been damaged by mining subsidence, he would realise that it is not the length of the road but the quality of the surface which causes major problems for the local authority. Use of wrong information and data lead to many anomalies.

I have said many times in the House that capping is based on inadequate standard spending assessments and on how much the poll tax is greater than SSA. The local authority does not set the SSA, so how can it be classed as an excessive spender if the amount of money that it can spend is laid down? It is pointless for Conservative Members to continue to describe local authorities as excessive spenders when they are no longer allowed to determine their own budgets. Even now, local authorities cannot set poll taxes more than 7 per cent. over their previous budgets. Central Government prescribe how much more poll tax they can levy, how much grant they receive and what can be spent. SSAs are crucial to capping, but they are totally discredited, being based on unfair information and irrelevancies.

As to aggregate external finance, the revenue support grant has been increased by only 1·9 per cent., whereas the national non-domestic rate has been increased by 19 per cent. When we talk about aggregate external finance, it is not, as the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) said, that the Government are making a 19 per cent. increase in funding. In fact, they are allowing for extra funding of 1·9 per cent. The rest will have to come from national non-domestic rates.

It is the business community that will have to find the bulk of the increase. In the past three weeks, up to 1,000 job losses have been announced in my constituency. Some of those cuts arise from a factory closure. It is not that the company concerned has gone bankrupt or that it has no orders. It has a number of factories and to save money it has simply decided to close down the one in my constituency. As long as we continue to pass the financial burden on to such businesses, that excuse will continue to be given for factory closures.

Aggregate external finance has been increased by 12·8 per cent., but only 7·7 per cent. of that is to be funded by central Government. We have capping criteria of 9 per cent., 7 per cent. and 5 per cent., depending on the

percentage above budget. Revenue support grant and business rates are decided by the Government. Now, budgets are prescribed by the Government. There is no accountability in that. There is no chance for the local elector to go to the polls and vote for or against a local authority that sets a high poll tax. In any case, in many instances last year, the elections came long after local electors had been made aware of what the poll tax levels would be.

Let me echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). My authority's SSA has been increased by 19·9 per cent. for 1991-92, yet we still come 36th in the list of 36 metropolitan districts. Manchester has an SSA of £1,550 per adult, yet in Barnsley we have £881 to provide the standard level of service. That means that Barnsley receives 55 per cent. of what Manchester receives to provide a standard service. What Barnsley can spend in the forthcoming year is to be restricted as a result of calculations based on the 1981 census and its irrelevancies.

There have been changes in the SSA methodology. I am almost embarrassed to say this, but Barnsley has benefited from a small increase in its standard spending assessment. I was not going to mention that fact in case it was the result of a mistake in the Department and it was taken away from us. We benefited to the tune of £500,000. Revenue support grant in Barnsley has been reduced by £17 per adult since last year, but the business rate poundage has been increased by 10·9 per cent.—bang in line with inflation. Why should not revenue support grant increase in line with inflation? Why cannot SSAs and budgets be increased in line with inflation? Why must the burden be passed on to non-domestic rate payers? In terms of area protection, my authority will lose £4·1 million under the arrangements.

When all those factors are taken together, the increase in central funding to Barnsley is 2·6 per cent., compared with a rate of inflation of more than 10 per cent. That amounts to roughly £50 per adult.

As I said, Barnsley is at the bottom of the list of metropolitan districts. We have been allowed a 7 per cent. increase this year in accordance with the new criteria. At least this year we know the extent to which we will be capped. We will be capped at £141·2 million—an increase of £9·2 million. But assuming pay awards of around 9 per cent., we will not have enough in this year's budget to fund those awards. In fact, £141 million is the budget that the authority set last year, which was then capped at £132 million.

The Secretary of State quoted the NALGO newspaper, which was also referred to by the hon. Member for Gedling, but both the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Gedling seemed to skim over what that magazine said about Barnsley. The reason is that Barnsley made some cuts: there were some compulsory redundancies, and the authority closed a music school.

The Secretary of State also referred to collection rates, and I was pleased to hear him say that Barnsley had a 93 per cent. collection rate. That shows the careful and accurate planning that some local authorities have been able to achieve.

My local authority allowed for an addition of 6 per cent. to the poll tax to meet the shortfall in collection and it got that figure right to within about 1 per cent. However, my constituents are now saying that they will pay their poll tax but not the 6 per cent. addition to cover the shortfall caused by people who will not pay, so we have created another problem for ourselves.

The SSA for the police has been increased by 10 per cent., compared with 19 per cent. for other service blocks. They have a budget forecast of £56 million, an increase of 12·8 per cent., a standstill budget, but they must cut it by 3·8 per cent., or just under £4 million. They need an increase of 12·8 per cent. to cover inflation, approved developments and 25 additional posts this year, to recover after the Hillsborough disaster and to protect the housing allowance and their capital programme. To lose £4 million will mean a cut of £1·75 million in natural wastage, 170 posts will have to go, the capital programme will have to go and they will have to use every penny of their reserves.

The fire service in South Yorkshire is in the same boat. It has a standstill budget when it needs an increase of about 12 per cent. It must cut about £2·1 million from its budget. It has had to impose a recruitment ban and a stop on capital schemes and use all its reserves.

Those are the cuts that authorities in Barnsley have been forced to make, yet they have a 93 per cent. collection rate and a record of good housekeeping. It is about time that the Secretary of State looked at what is happening to those authorities and got rid of the poll tax once and for all.

9.21 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I pay tribute to the thoughtful contributions that a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have made. In particular, I pay tribute to those of my hon. Friends who, by necessity, contributed only briefly at the end. Regrettably, part of today's debate made last week's debates on the Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill seem one of the most radical and lively political events of my recent life.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) said, it is a great shame that we have not been able to concentrate more on what the debate is about. It is surely about the Government's role in supporting local government services. Instead, Conservative Members have tried to prove the unprovable or to make statements, as the Secretary of State did at the beginning, to show that—despite the fact that they do not like the more draconian capping rules that are being brought in for the coming year—on average Labour-controlled authorities charge a higher poll tax than Conservative authorities.

Apart from the fact that the SSA has no semblance of common sense, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central, (Mr. Illsley) said, there is the little matter of the make-up of the area. Even despite that, the facts that the Secretary of State gave do not necessarily bear out the conclusions that he drew.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy early last year analysed poll tax bills in Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democratic authorities and in those where no political party had overall control. Taking the poll tax average in each of those categories, and comparing those with the target or notional average figures that have been determined by the Government in terms of what they expect those authorities to charge in relation to their SSAs, CIPFA came to the conclusion that, on average, Conservative-controlled authorities were 31

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per cent. above their targets, Labour-controlled authorities were 35 per cent. above and Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities and those where no political party had control were 36 per cent. above their target. That produced an average difference of only 4 per cent. between all Labour and Conservative authorities, in the extent to which they spent above the target or notional figure set for each of them. Let us hear no more nonsensical claims that Tory councils set low poll taxes.

It is difficult to recall what was said at the start of the debate, but the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) clearly spelled out the twisted rationale of the poll tax, when he described how little Surrey county council spends per head of its population. Those who are in need would no doubt remark on the depressed level of service that it offers. Nevertheless, poll tax levels in all the Surrey districts are among the highest in the country—£200 per head above the figure charged by capped Calderdale. The Surrey authorities make those in the north of England——

Mr. Portillo: What about the safety net?

Mr. Blunkett: What about it? It replaced equalisation, but attempted to take some account of an authority's resource base. In any event, it is being phased out. That apart, I know of no safety net that would account for the disparities in the charges made by authorities such as Wigan, St. Helens, Calderdale, North Tyneside, Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley—many of which strive to serve coalfield communities—and those imposed by Berkshire and Surrey. The logic of the poll tax is that it can often result in very large bills but a very poor quality of service.

Mr. Wilshire: I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument up to a point, but he twice dragged into his remarks accusations about poor levels of service. I would not attempt to remark on the level of service provided in Sheffield and, as the hon. Gentleman does not have the slightest notion of the standards observed in Surrey, he should not denigrate its authorities. I made the point that, for much lower expenditure, one could arrive at the same standard of service. The hon. Gentleman ought to get his facts right.

Mr. Blunkett: We do not accept that one can devise a formula that will result in the same standard of service for a standard level of poll tax, given an assessment of need from the centre of the kind in which the Secretary of State believes. In 1980, the present Secretary of State for Defence was the local government Minister and he came out with some political tripe when he asserted that a standard level of service can be provided for a standard charge to ratepayers, as they were known in those days. He said that the Government accepted that their assessment was a way of determining the distribution of grant and did not necessarily lead them to believe that that particular level of service was right for a particular locality.

That Minister moved on, and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), having served as Secretary of State for the Environment, has also moved on in his own mysterious way, eventually to return to that office. If he studies those debates from the early 1980s, it will become obvious to him that one cannot make an assessment from the centre.

Tonight's debate should have concentrated on the quality of local authority services. For what purpose does the revenue support grant exist? It was supposed to support local authorities in meeting the needs determined by local political debate and was supplemented by local taxation in order to provide the best services to the community concerned.

However, hardly anyone has mentioned the RSG tonight—least of all Conservative Members. Instead, hon. Members seemed to talk for hours about the Audit Commission. Vacancies in housing seem to be a favourite target—that is now separated from the general fund. Hon. Members have done anything rather than address provision of services. Surely the second leg of the debate should have been about the other function of the Government, which is to provide a safety net or provision through rebates to help those who cannot meet the bills levied on them under whatever system. However, we have heard nothing about rebates either. The third leg should have been about the inequalities that exist between localities and people. Hence the previously accepted need for equalisation and the existence of the safety net.

None of those issues has been considered in the debate because Conservative Members and Ministers do not want to admit that, if we still had the system that appertained before 31 March last year, and a broad base of local taxation, which involved the business community as well as the domestic tax payer, and we did not have a national business rate, and if we took out the Government's contribution towards the safety net process, which is another £500 million, we would be left with the Government providing peanuts for local government service support in the coming financial year. That is my answer to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). The Government are providing a 1·9 per cent. increase in revenue support grant in 1991-92.

Dr. Hampson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the reason why, whether under the rating or the community charge system, people felt that their bills were too high is because local authorities spend such a huge proportion of national expenditure? That is why, in our system, the Treasury feels that it has to get a grip upon it. Therefore, does he see the sense of transferring the key national service that causes this huge cost—education? The Leader of the Opposition, when he was an education spokesman—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman remembers this from his Sheffield days—advocated the transfer of education costs to the centre. What does he think now?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not need to duck that question, because the Opposition are against the centralisation of services. Incidentally, the figures are interesting. From 1979 until the last financial year, central Government spending rose by 177 per cent., while local government spending rose by 146 per cent. We need to understand clearly what has happened.

To return to the hon. Gentleman's intervention, his implication is that central Government would spend less on education if it were centralised, because the same amount would have to be found to maintain the same level of pupil-teacher ratio and the same standard of equipment and books, which many Labour authorities have been

penalised for attempting to provide in the past 12 years. It is interesting that, when people want to say how good our education system is, they hold up figures showing how much money is being spent on it, but when they want to beat local government—especially Labour local government—they point out how much is being spent which should not be spent. The truth is that centralisation and interference would make matters a great deal worse than they already are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), the shadow spokesman for education, mentioned, in an intervention, that Warwickshire county council faces draconian cuts in education, and is wiping out nursery provision to meet Government targets. In fact, the county council has said that it has no intention of trying to meet the Government's poll tax targets, which are predicted on standard spending levels that are totally unacceptable.

I have mentioned before, and I make no apology for mentioning again the index of need, which applies an all-ages index factor in a way that results in Wandsworth, Westminster and councils in the south of England being among the 20 most deprived authorities in Britain, while Barnsley is 172nd and Rotherham is 146th and such councils are penalised because no account was taken of unemployment or car ownership.

The system is farcical: the more deprived an authority appears to be, the less likely it is to receive central Government support. Given the current procedure, it is impossible to make a fair assessment of how grant should be allocated; nor can we assess the way in which authorities should handle their budgets. There is no longer any accountability: the Secretary of State controls not only the relationship between previous rate bills and this year's poll tax bills through the new community charge reduction scheme, but next year's bills themselves, through capping and the standard spending assessments. There is more centralisation than ever before, and accountability has been denied to local authorities.

Yet help might have been provided. The £1·2 billion of extra assistance could have been used to provide services that now face enormous cuts. A number of my hon. Friends have given examples, and I make no apology—I rarely mention Sheffield from the Dispatch Box—for saying that my authority is in a dire state, given the likely funding for services over the coming year. Even after the use of balances, cuts amounting to £20 million must be made and 2,500 people are being offered voluntary redundancy between now and 1 April.

That is a sorry picture and is entirely due to the way in which the Government assess need and determine the provision of grant. It has nothing to do with whether the city provides too high a level of social services, as was implied by the figures given in the Secretary of State's speech, or with whether the police authority—which has a much better record than the Metropolitan police, who are controlled directly by the Government—is putting too many men on the beat. Nor has it anything to do with the level of the fire service or with the extent and quality of education. But it has everything to do with the unfair system in which authorities operate.

We all agree that the finding of money with which to fight Saddam Hussein is justified and right; but we cannot justify circumstances in which we can afford to fight Saddam but cannot afford to fight poverty, ignorance, under-achievement, unfit housing, declining transport standards and a despoiled environment in the most deprived parts of the country. It is a disgrace that we can fight a war abroad, but cannot fight a war against decline at home. It is entirely wrong that, while our manufacturing industry collapses around us, we in the Chamber discuss how the screw can be tightened on local government to make the lives of councillors and managers more miserable and to worsen the plight of the recipients of services. It is a disgrace that a wealthy and proud nation, which wishes to play its part on the world stage, cannot ensure that people have home helps when they need them or are provided with a decent education and a decent start in life.

It is time that we addressed those issues, so that we can equate the decisions made by the Government with the rubbish that we hear from Conservative Members about the need to cut services still further to protect the hard-pressed poll tax payer. What we need is not further cuts in services, but a complete change in the relationship between local and central Government. We need a new system for the funding of local services at local level and a new grant system that takes out of the political arena the gerrymandering and jiggery-pokery that the community charge reduction scheme will involve in the coming year. We should be debating not the saving of Conservative seats, but the saving of services. We should be talking about the need for the revenue support grant to ensure that people are given their entitlement.

The final humiliation for the poll tax is that the community charge reduction scheme has directly to relate the relief given to the so-called "despised" old-fashioned rating system. What we have before us is the view that, if we cannot better the rating system, we should provide an additional £1·2 billion to bribe people into believing that the poll tax was not so bad when it was introduced.

The Secretary of State knows that that is not right. In *The Times* article that he wrote in May of last year he made it clear that he did not believe in capping or in the poll tax and that he did not believe in the system that he now has to operate. We know that the Prime Minister thinks that it is crazy. Last Thursday—as repeated, in his own words tonight, by the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell)—he told us that, when over half the poll tax payers have to be provided with relief, there is something wrong with the system.

All of us know that there is something wrong with the system. The Labour party has an alternative: action to meet need, the restoration of the public services that so many people were proud of, a determination to restore quality and confidence to local authority services and a commitment to local democracy and diversity. We offer an alternative to the poll tax and to centralisation and bureaucratic interference. We offer an end to this misery. We also offer an end to this shambles that the Government have inflicted on the British people.

The Government will be held to account for all the misery that they have inflicted on the people whom we try to represent. It will come home to roost when people at last realise that they have the chance to vote on the most important political domestic issue that will face us at the next general election—that is, whether Conservative Members will come out and say that they intend to do something substantial about the poll tax or whether people will hear, loud and clear, from the Labour party that only we have promised outright and within the shortest possible time to abolish the tax that is at the root of all our problems.

9.41 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Let me begin uncontroversially and quietly by agreeing with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) that there have been many good contributions to the debate.

I begin with the community charge reduction scheme. It is a very fine scheme. It was rightly praised by my hon. Friends the Members for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and others. However, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) asked a series of questions about it. He wanted to know what the net additional cost this year will be. It is £1·1 billion for Great Britain. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made it perfectly clear that that was the figure that he intended to add to the planning total. However, the total to be spent this year on the scheme is £1·7 billion. That is why it is possible to help 18 million community charge payers by means of the scheme.

The hon. Member for Dagenham wondered whether we had got our arithmetic right. He is worried about the number of people who may no longer be eligible because they move, or for other reasons. In our figures, we have allowed for a 10 per cent. turnover. The hon. Gentleman referred to the changes to the register in London. If a couple move from one place to another in London or anywhere else, that constitutes four changes to the register —two when they leave and two when they arrive somewhere else. That, therefore, is not the indicator. The hon. Gentleman will find that the average mortgage that people take out runs for eight years, which suggests that the turnover is of the order that we have set.

This scheme, in common with its predecessorr, the transitional relief scheme, applies to those non-ratepayers who are disabled or elderly. By "disabled" we mean people who are in receipt of invalidity benefit, attendance allowance, mobility allowance or mobility supplement. The new scheme will also apply to those in sheltered housing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) referred to the uniform business rate, as did the hon. Members for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). Under the new system, we are required by statute to have a revaluation after five years, to take effect in 1995. The question is whether transitional help can be given beyond that period. That will depend partly on whether the revaluation throws up new values that require transitional relief to continue. We are certainly willing to consider that matter.

The increase in uniform business rate set on the September retail price index is 10·9 per cent. I remind hon. Members—my hon. Friends know this well—that, under the old rating system, when business was at the mercy of Labour local authorities, to get away with an increase of 10·9 per cent. would have been an exceptional year for business. As a result of the change that we have made, in the first year of the uniform business rate, the amount that we have raised from business in rates is £1 billion less than we would have raised under the old system, because the increase has been limited to inflation.

Fortunately, there was more in the uniform business rate pot than we had anticipated, and that has made it possible for us to pass more from the uniform business rate into aggregate external finance—the total amount that passes from central Government to local government for next year. That is up by 12·8 per cent.

That is the figure that really matters to local authorities. They are not concerned to know how much is rate support grant or how much is non-domestic rates. They want to know how much help they will get from the centre. An increase of 12·8 per cent. next year is a generous settlement, and most local authority leaders have welcomed it as realistic.

I should like to say something to my hon. Friends about how the SSAs are calculated. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) was particularly thoughtful on the subject. It is most important to recognise that we calculate SSAs on the same basis for everyone. I make no apology to the hon. Member for Brightside when I say that we are trying to arrive at a position in which we calculate that authorities could provide a standard level of service for a given level of community charge. We recognise that different areas have different needs, and that the Government have to give different amounts of money to help local authorities with those different needs. As soon as one tries to measure different needs in different places, disputes will arise: the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) fairly recognised that point.

Since the community charge was introduced, we have had an entirely new system of assessing those needs. The system was thoroughly overhauled. We have had a new analysis and a great deal of work has been done on what makes it more expensive in one place than in another to provide a standard level of service. There was a huge amount of discussion with the local authority associations.

I fully accept what my hon. Friends will expect me to say, which is that there can be no final word about standard spending assessments. Of course they are imperfect, but they are the best guide we have to the different needs of different local authorities, and therefore to the different amounts of money that we should be able to provide. Even my hon. Friends who are dissatisfied with their standard spending assessments will recognise that there is merit in retaining as far as possible, stability between one year and the next if we are ever to see accountability showing through.

I recognise that there were shortcomings in the standard spending assessments. Some are inevitable. For instance, on overnight visitors we have no reliable data more recent than the mid-1970s. We need to collect more. Much of our information relies on the 1981 census. We shall have a 1991 census, and that will make life easier for us.

I must tell my hon. Friends that looking at two neighbouring areas and feeling that the standard spending assessments between the two are not immediately explicable—in other words, that their intuition and our analysis are at variance—does not automatically prove that the standard spending assessments are wrong, because we are trying to measure different levels of need in different areas.

Of course Ministers are constrained. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) said that he thought that I would do more if I could. It has always been such a pleasure to meet him and my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) that, if I had £10 million in my pocket for Warwickshire, I would

feel inclined to give it to him. However, he knows how constrained we are, because Ministers must behave reasonably and in line with the evidence presented to them.

There has been new evidence and we have brought it into play. For instance, there was new evidence on the buses and coaches within the highway maintenance standard spending assessment, and we made a change. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said that there should be some presiding human presence involved in all this. I try to be a presiding human presence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is more presiding and no less human. My right hon. Friend and I have used our judgment on an issue that concerns many of my hon. Friends and even Opposition Members, and that is the weighting within education given on the basis of additional educational needs. We decided to reduce that weighting on the basis of the analysis that had been carried out. We exercised our judgment when we doubled the weighting given to overnight visitors.

Several points were made about how SSAs operate. I was asked how children in care could cost different amounts in different places. Analysis has shown that, in some places of great social deprivation, a higher proportion of children need to be taken into residential care much more frequently, which is more expensive.

I was asked why we do not use unemployment as an indicator. We are trying to find out what makes local authority services more expensive, and those are more social factors than unemployment factors. I was asked by the hon. Member for Brightside why we do not use the indicator of car ownership. In the country, people have a higher propensity to own cars, even if they are poor. To use that would be to the disadvantage of the cities, which the hon. Gentleman wants to protect.

Mr. Battle: Will the Minister explain why the Department used car ownership, unemployment and other social factors when assessing urban development grant?

Mr. Portillo: We have considered what makes local authority services more expensive. That is a different exercise from urban development grant. It is not car ownership or unemployment but social factors that incur more expense for local authorities. We are focused on the right issue.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) asked what would happen if his local authority or any other authority incurred special costs because of the Gulf crisis. We hope that that will not arise, but demands could be placed on social services. I give him the assurance that we shall consider that carefully if and when it becomes clear that a local authority is facing significant new burdens as a result of the Gulf crisis. He has my assurance on that point.

We had some debate—the hon. Member for Brightside complained about it—on efficiency in local government. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West spoke lucidly of the advantages of competitive tendering. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), in an excellent speech, told us of the work being done in Wandsworth and gave that extraordinarily telling example of how much more rubbish was collected per man in Wandsworth than in Southwark. I was alarmed when I heard that, under Labour's plans, the Audit Commission, which does such good work, would be subsumed. "Subsumed" is a nasty socialist verb which I shall add to my socialist phrase book.

We had much wriggling from the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) in defence of Lambeth. He came up with a marvellous phrase. He said that he would not deny that in Lambeth there were some elements of inefficiency. That may go down in the phrases of the year. He may find himself in the colour magazines at the end of the year because of it.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) that not even the police are immune from making gains in efficiency. The Audit Commission, which under Labour's plans will be subsumed, has drawn attention to the efficiency gains that can——

Mr. Gould: The Minister does not understand the verb.

Mr. Portillo: I hope that I do not understand the verb. What I understand by it is so grisly that I am extremely worried about Labour's plans.

The Audit Commission, which is safe in our hands—let me put it that way—has pointed out that the police authorities are capable of making many gains in efficiency. In West Mercia, for example, a review of administrative procedures saved £5 million for the police, largely by transferring functions from uniformed officers to civilians. Nationally, it has been observed that the police receive twice as many training days per annum as other public sector workers. It has been identified that savings of 15 per cent. are available in police communications and that a 25 per cent. increase—in many cases much more—in income generation is possible within police forces. The point that I am making is that, whatever may have been said to my hon. Friends, the sacking of policemen is not by any means the only option for police authorities.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Many of us understand completely the herculean nature of the task that my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State face. However, we are extremely anxious about the threats to sack policemen, particularly in the west midlands. The very thought of 100 policemen being sacked puts a chill into our hearts. We are told by our chief constable that no more savings can easily be made. In those circumstances, can the Minister tell us that we may be voting for the sacking of 100 policemen?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that my hon. Friend will be voting for any such thing. I have told her that I believe that there are efficiency savings to be made and that any police authority, such as the one in her area—I have just listed four examples—should be able to meet its statutory obligations.

In any case, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained how the capping procedure works. He explained that, if a police authority were to find that it had to spend in such a way that it came within our capping criteria, we should very carefully consider its situation on its individual merits. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned that, if a police authority were to spend all its reserves, it might be in a difficult position.

Obviously, if a police authority were to find itself in an emergency, the situation would be dealt with properly at the time, and we should consider the consequences very

[Mr. Portillo]

carefully. However, police authorities should have regard to their statutory duties with respect to our intended criteria, the approved level of police manpower and all other relevant considerations. I think that that ought to reassure my hon. Friend.

Mr. Turner: I want to ask a question about efficiency within the Audit Commission. Has the commission raised with the Government the question of the delay in paying the revenue support grant to local authorities? The council in Wolverhampton will have to add £3 to every poll tax bill in the next year because of the Government's refusal to pay at the proper time.

Mr. Portillo: I am a great believer in central Government playing their part. I am sorry that these reports are being debated so late in the day. However, hon. Members will understand that the Government wanted time to bring in the community charge reduction scheme. That has been very much welcomed on the Government side of the House, even if it has been received grudgingly by the Opposition.

My hon. Friends are worried about fire authorities. In that case, the Government will decide on capping after the budgets have been set, again taking account of all the appropriate considerations, including the scope for achieving greater value for money and the need to maintain the minimum standards of fire cover. The Home Secretary's approval would be required for the closure of any fire station or for any other reduction of operational capacity. I hope that that will assure my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne reminded us that this debate is not concerned principally with the community charge. In that respect, the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham was disappointing, because he dwelt so much on the community charge and so little on the reports. His speech was largely familiar to us. His accusation that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had made no progress was shot down by all my hon. Friends who welcomed the community charge reduction scheme.

If the hon. Member for Dagenham said anything that was relevant, it was that there is not enough money. He said that the £3 billion extra that is being provided and the £1·7 billion for the community charge reduction scheme were insufficient. If we offered £30 billion and £17 billion——

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: No: I am in my last minute.

—the hon. Gentleman would still be saying that that was not enough. The hon. Gentleman's attitude to money is still wholly irresponsible. Independent observers, such as Mr. Tony Travers, have observed that this is the most generous RSG settlement since the mid-1970s. The Government have found another £4·25 billion, yet the hon. Gentleman says that that is not enough even though this year's spending is up by 31 per cent. compared to public spending just two years ago.

The hon. Member for Dagenham says that he favours spending £40·8 billion next year, which would be 47 per cent. up on spending two years ago. His position remains profligate, unbelievable and irresponsible. I urge the House to vote with the Government tonight.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 220.

Division No. 50] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*

Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin

McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1991-92 (House of Commons Paper No. 93), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the order [25 January], to put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the other motions relating to local government finance.*

Resolved,

That the Population Report (England) (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 94), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heseltine.]*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 95), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heseltine.]*

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 96), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heseltine.]*

Resolved,

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1989-90 (House of Commons Paper No. 12), a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heseltine.]*

Mr. Speaker: Welsh revenue support grant—Mr. Secretary Hunt.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On the Welsh revenue support grant?

Mrs. Gorman: It is on the previous item. I understand that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) made a vitriolic speech about me and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). We were not in the Chamber to discuss Basildon's rates because we were both engaged elsewhere on other business. Neither of us was informed by the hon. Gentleman that he intended to make that speech. We feel that it was a gross discourtesy to the House and to us.

Mr. Speaker: It is always sad when hon. Members are not in the Chamber to hear debates. I cannot help the hon. Lady. She had better take the matter up with the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

Local Government Finance (Wales)

Mr. Speaker: I understand that it will be convenient to discuss all three motions. There will be a Division at the end of the debate.

10.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1991-92 (House of Commons Paper No. 78), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

I am delighted that we are taking also the associated motions:

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 79), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 80), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

The report embody the decisions that I announced in the House on 17 January on Welsh local government finance and the settlement for 1991-92. In announcing my decisions to the House, I described the settlement as good news for local authorities and Welsh charge payers and clearly that was a realistic assessment.

It is not necessary this evening to repeat the decisions that I announced on 17 January, but I remind the House that I am allowing local authorities additional spending of 8 per cent. on 1990-91 budgets. That is 1 per cent. more than will be allowed in England. With the improved outlook for inflation during 1991-92, I am confident that that will be an entirely adequate level of spending to cover inflationary and other pressures and to meet the cost of new responsibilities.

As the House will know, the Audit Commission has shown that there is considerable potential for all local authorities to secure further efficiency savings. I am anxious that they should do so in order to release further resources for the development of services. On 17 January I commended the work of Welsh local authorities to secure greater efficiency and I do so again tonight. Local authorities in Wales have also recognised that much remains to be done and clearly they are getting on with the job.

The distribution report sets out the calculations for each authority's standard spending assessment. The overall increase in SSAs is 15 per cent., the average for counties being 14 per cent. and the average for districts being 21 per cent. These increases are substantial and give the lie to those who argue that the settlement is inadequate. I am pleased to tell the House that once again in Wales we have been able to reach full agreement with the local authority associations on the formulae for calculating SSAs.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): We do not understand them.

Mr. Hunt: Fortunately, the Welsh local authorities and the Welsh Office understand them. I believe that Government Back Benchers understand them. It is a shame that the Opposition have yet to catch up.

Mr. Win Griffiths: One point intrigues me. I have read the reports. In the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 2) table 1.5 on page 11 deals with the standard spending assessment. Can the Secretary of State explain on what basis the estimated expenditure additions are calculated? They do not seem to bear any relationship to the interim SSAs. For example, how is the estimated expenditure addition calculated for Neath as compared with the one for Ogwr?

Mr. Hunt: It is simple, if the hon. Gentleman will concentrate for a moment. The standard spending assessment for Ogwr in the 1991-92 settlement is £17,218,000 which is an increase of 16·5 per cent. A 2 per cent. decrease in population has meant, however, that the SSA increase need not be as high as the district average. That is why the figures for Ogwr are as set out. However, taking the last two years for the estimated expenditure additions and looking at the background of the SSAs, the figures have increased by 35 per cent., which is one of the highest increases in Wales. If the hon. Gentleman referred to his local authority, he would find that it agrees with the assessment.

On the interim SSA, the hon. Gentleman will see that the composite secondary indicator and the secondary factor accumulate to the current SSA. If he reads the table in that context he will see how the figures add up. Other hon. Members seem to be aware of the background to the figures. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would consult his colleagues.

On the aggregate external finance, the level of Government support for Welsh local authority spending remains at close to 80 per cent. of total standard spending. When I announced my proposals for the settlement last July, I reminded the House of my predecessor's commitment that no resources would be lost to Wales as a result of moving to the new system. The settlement shows that that commitment is being honoured; indeed, when grant in support of the new community charge reduction scheme is taken into account, more than 82 per cent. of the expenditure of Welsh local government will be met from sources other than the community charge payer, if authorities spend in line with the plans which I have already described as adequate.

That takes me to the good news for the community charge payer which the settlement represents. The corollary of 82 per cent. Government support is that only 18 per cent. of the cost of local authority services will be met by charge payers. The House should further be aware that this figure is reduced to less than 15 per cent. when community charge benefit is taken into account. The average charge payable when benefits and the community charge reduction scheme are taken into account will be less than £170—always provided, as I point out time and time again, that local authorities spend in line with these plans.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): In line with the figures that my right hon. Friend has given, I think that it would be appropriate if, at this point he told us something about collection rates.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) may try to correct me again, but I understand that the latest figures on collection show a very favourable position in Wales and that districts in Wales—where, as hon. Members will know, community charges averaged £232 this year—are now on target to collect at least 95 per cent. of this year's charge. That is the figure given by a survey conducted by the Council of Welsh Districts. That survey, which I understand to be the first in Wales,

[Mr. Hunt]

suggests that council treasurers' initial assumptions in respect of non-payment are being proved correct. In Swansea, 97 per cent. of adults have made a payment towards the community charge. That figure is followed closely by those of Lliw Valley, Brecknock and Carmarthen at 96 per cent., and 95 per cent. respectively. Cardiff and Ogwr register 94 per cent. Top of the income table is Lliw Valley—where 77 per cent. of the year's cash was collected by the end of November—and it is followed closely by Carmarthen.

Those figures show a tremendous effort on the part of local authorities and all the staff concerned. They also show that, in Wales, non-collection and non-payment have been a total failure. People in Wales recognise their responsibility to pay the community charge, and they have done so.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Does the Secretary of State have the figures for Rhondda?

Mr. Hunt: I understand that Rhondda has had one of the best collection rates. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will confirm or deny the latest news that I have received from Rhondda, which is that 98 per cent. of charge payers are expected to pay the community charge.

Mr. Rogers: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman says, that is a record of which Rhondda has every right to be proud.

I understand that one Opposition Member has told the press that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he may criticise the community charge reduction scheme. Let me give the House 10 reasons why I believe our scheme is a very good one which should be the envy of England.

First, 67 per cent. of charge payers—more than two in three—will get an automatic reduction which they will not even have to claim. Secondly, 612 of our 865 communities will get relief, whereas only 323 got relief this year. Thirdly, all charge payers in those communities facing the highest average increases in the transfer to the new system from the rates will benefit. Fourthly, charge payers know in advance exactly how much their reduction will be. Fifthly, £20 million is available in 1990-91 and that will increase to £62 million next year.

Sixthly, all the £62 million is to go directly to reducing bills. Seventhly, there are no significant administrative costs and no local government bureaucracy. Eighthly, people who have moved house since 1 April 1990 will not lose out. Ninthly, people in sheltered accommodation in qualifying communities will get their assistance automatically. Finally, the Welsh local authority associations agreed in 1990 that the Welsh scheme provides the best all-round arrangement for Wales, and I believe that what has happened has proved that point.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Secretary of State accept that, despite those 10 points, people on low incomes in difficult financial circumstances will not benefit while others on high incomes who can well afford to pay, more will benefit from a £80 or £90 reduction? This is not such a finely tuned system and not all that fair to those on low incomes.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman will recall that such anomalies were pointed out during initial discussions of the scheme. Despite that, all the local authority associations in Wales agreed that it was the best possible solution for Wales. They agreed that it would be the best system for Wales.

Mr. Rogers: Further to the rather sanctimonious point madce by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), what does the Secretary of State think about Plaid Cymru councillors, professional people on high salaries, refusing to pay their poll tax, although they can afford it, and leading campaigns against the poll tax, who avail themselves of services, sending their children to school and having their refuse collected, while old-age pensioners and others subsidise them? Will the Secretary of State condemn those Plaid Cymru councillors whose refusal to pay their poll tax means that poor people on low incomes have to pay extra? It has been calculated that in the Rhondda the surcharge may be as much as £20 to £30 extra as a result of people such as the Plaid Cymru councillor refusing to pay.

Mr. Wigley: Labour councillors do the Tories' dirty work for them.

Mr. Hunt: I am reluctant to intervene, but I suppose that I must.

Irrespective of party, I strongly condemn any person in a position of authority who urges others to follow his or her example in not paying the community charge. It means that that individual is trying to get a free ride on the backs of others in the community. In that respect, I could not agree more with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers).

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) spoke about people on low incomes. We have a generous community charge rebate scheme which was not taken into account when I gave the figure of an average £200 community charge. If one takes into account the rebate as well as the community charge reduction scheme, charge payers in Wales will be paying on average less than £170, and that is a great advantage in comparison with England and Scotland.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): The Secretary of State has listed the 10 advantages, but who imposed the exorbitant charges in the first place? Does he realise that he cannot deny responsibility for that?

Mr. Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me explain that the settlement for this financial year is adequate and that any extra amount over and above that predicted in the settlement is wholly due to the spending decisions of individual councils.

I hope that people will recognise that we have targeted this enhanced protection on those areas of relatively low average rateable value where the impact of the new system has been greatest. I hope that, on reflection, they will agree that this represents the right approach and one which properly reflects Welsh circumstances.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): If the Secretary of State is targeting things properly, why is it that, in communities such as mine, the Gurnos and Gellideg council estates receive no transitional benefit under the system?

Mr. Hunt: Because the scheme is based on areas of relatively low average rateable value. That was the basis on which it was agreed with the local authority associations.

That is the only basis on which one can calculate those who lose and gain when moving from a system where local taxation is based on rateable value to one based on the new community charge. It was agreed with local authorities that, that was the best system. About 300 communities will not benefit from the scheme, but the £62 million is being spent to best effect. If we introduced the English transitional scheme to Wales, many fewer people would benefit, and the amount that would feed through to them would be much lower, too.

Mr. Rowlands: The Minister gave an elongated reply to my question, but I can tell him that, under the old rating system, a husband and wife on the Gellideg or Gurnos estates paid about £300 a year. By any standards, they are not the wealthiest communities in my constituency or in south Wales. If the benefit is targeted as the Minister suggests, why has it missed those communities?

Mr. Hunt: I gave not an elongated but a factual reply, and explained that targeting is based on the average rateable value. If people individually or collectively cannot afford to pay, they may be entitled to community charge benefit, which is being received by more than 500,000 charge payers in Wales. That is special targeting over and above the reduction scheme that I described.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): In that case, why cannot the lowest-paid people in our society afford to pay even 20 per cent. of their poll tax? Also, the Audit Commission calculated that it costs more to administer that collection than it produces in revenue.

Mr. Hunt: If the 20 per cent. sector were removed, those who receive income support enhancement to meet that commitment would be worse off. That enhancement is calculated on the average community charge in England and Wales, which is very much higher than the average in Wales alone. Therefore, the amount received by those on income support is greater than the sum that they have to pay.

Collection costs are a factor, although I do not have precise figures. Nevertheless, the requirement to make a 20 per cent. contribution is part of a scheme to ensure that everyone pays something towards the cost of the services that they use. In Wales, those concerned receive more through the benefit system, on average, than they are required to pay.

As to local authority budgets in 1991-92, following representations from local authority associations, I have chosen not to announce community charge capping criteria but to reconsider the position in the light of the budgets set. I made it clear to the associations and to every Welsh local authority—as I have to the House on several occasions—that I am looking to them to adopt prudent budgetary policies. If local authorities fail to do so, they will place themselves in jeopardy not only of charge capping, but of lower levels of external financing and of spending in the future.

Local authorities have a responsibility to their community charge payers to spend closely in line with the settlement and to set their charges accordingly. I am encouraged by recent press reports suggesting that some local authorities have already adopted that approach, and I look to others to follow that lead. The choice is theirs.

The settlements before the House this evening will surely become a thing of the past if local authorities do not respond appropriately. As it is, the settlement that I am presenting this year is good for local authorities, good for charge payers and good for Wales. I commend it to the House.

10.39 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The House is grateful to the Secretary of State for his exposition, but he was less than frank when dealing with the credits of his community charge reduction scheme. He might have told us that, as recently as 22 January, Mr. Dennis Puddle, a councillor and chairman of the Welsh district councils, wrote to the right hon. Gentleman at the Welsh Office and listed five alternative, arguably better schemes, for using the £42 million. The first two involve removing the 20 per cent. minimum payment and the others are to pay relief in Wales to individuals, as in England, not to communities.

That was a constructive letter and, in making a constructive speech, the right hon. Gentleman might have referred to Mr. Puddle's communication to him, because it puts a different gloss on the 10 points that he listed in support of his reduction scheme.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an early chance to respond to his remarks. I saw that letter for the first time only a few hours ago.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): That is because the Secretary of State did not consult.

Mr. Hunt: No. I have only just seen the letter, and if the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside looks at it, he will see that the alternative scheme encompasses areas other than community charge relief. Against the arguments put forward, Councillor Puddle says:

"It is accepted that the limited 1990-91 Transitional Relief scheme avoided significant"—

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): That is the old one for 1990-91.

Mr. Hunt: The new scheme has exactly the same basis as the transitional relief scheme.

Mr. Michael: That is the point.

Mr. Hunt: Councillor Puddle said:

"It is accepted that the limited . . . Transitional Relief scheme avoided significant additional administration costs."

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman wriggles. His officials sent him a copy of the letter and they marked it. It was not good enough for the right hon. Gentleman to present the case for his charge change without referring to this letter. I have brought the letter to the attention of the House and he has been forced to concede that there are other methods—Councillor Puddle lists five. The right hon. Gentleman should, in all honour, have brought that letter to the attention of the House, and I must protest at his omission.

No amount of fine words will persuade the people of Wales to support the poll tax, because the Minister's fine words do not relate to the gathering intensity of the recession in Wales. It is a fact that our local authorities want to enhance their economic development policies. Their associations say that this settlement does not encourage them to do so. The increase in the business rate of about 10·9 per cent. is twice the projected rate of inflation, and that will add to the problems of business in Wales in the current recession.

[Mr. Jones]

May I remind the hon. Gentleman about the business rate and the recession? We have heard about the pending closure of the Deep Navigation pit, with 370 jobs. Mardy colliery has been axed; there are likely to be high-tech redundancies in Gwent at Mitel; Brymbo steelworks has closed; Laura Ashley factories are closing; Holyhead port will be hit; a G-Plan furniture factory in Wrexham will close; Glendale Furniture factory on Deeside is in the hands of the receiver; quarry jobs are to be lost in Gwynedd; and on Deeside, 200 Castle Cement jobs are to go.

The local authorities have consistently stated that the settlement is insufficient to enable them to deal with existing policies, population trends and central Government initiatives and legislation. A gap of about £50 million or more was identified by the local authorities—it remains. That is the view of the Welsh counties and the Welsh districts.

The settlement is very volatile. The extremes, in relation to the revenue support grant average, are astonishing. The high, for Meirionnydd—and good luck to it—is 32·9 per cent., while the low, for contiguous Montgomery, is minus 1·5 per cent. My district council, Alyn and Deeside, will receive only 0·4 per cent.—an extra £13,000—and the borough of Colwyn only 1·2 per cent., despite its pressing problems.

I do not think that the Secretary of State has fully considered the impact on council budgets, which will be considerable. The district councils are aghast at the implications of, for example, the litter code of practice: they say that the lack of specific provision for districts is more than worrying. The forecast costs are four to six times higher than the highest Government figure.

The Welsh district councils are also worried about the implications for housing investment. Compared with the 1987-90 Welsh district housing investment average, the current figure represents a real-terms reduction of no less than £75 million, or 25 per cent. There is a housing crisis in Wales and homelessness is an increasing and, in many instances, heartbreaking problem. It is becoming more and more difficult to find a house at an affordable rent, and many Welsh people find it almost impossible to afford a mortgage. Mortgages in Wales—a land, often, of low wages—are sky-high. Opposition Members think that the Government's policies have made Wales's housing problems worse, and the most severe problems are still in the valleys; although problems exist elsewhere, sometimes to a daunting extent.

Mr. Alan Williams: Swansea—where 1,000 houses are defective and most will have to be demolished—faces a cost of £75 million; the Secretary of State's housing allocation is £5 million, which must cover all costs. And he describes this as a generous settlement.

Mr. Jones: In that instance, it cannot be described as generous. My right hon. Friend and our hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) are constantly making that point, on behalf of a city council with a superb housing reputation. We should remind the Secretary of State that local authorities want to improve pre-war council estates—to tackle the problem of defective pre-reinforced concrete homes, renovate private homes, implement special schemes to deal with homelessness and build new council houses and flats. Will the Government agree to allow Welsh councils to use at least 50 per cent. of council house sale receipts, as the districts ask? Will they also permit the use of non-house sale receipts, up to a limit of 75 per cent.?

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the new community charge reduction scheme. The House will recall that I broadly welcomed the news when it was announced last week. If the Government do not intend to abolish the poll tax—we can draw that conclusion—any relief is to be welcomed. According to the Government's figures, two thirds of the population of Wales will receive some relief from the scheme. That suggests that the Government have no confidence in the system.

The Secretary of State skirted round the capping issue. The inadequacy of the settlement means that local authorities will have great difficulty maintaining their current level of services and staying within the spending limits. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to apply caps? If so, why does not he announce the criteria? Will he confirm that the English criteria are to be used? In his statement on 23 July he said that he would publish in advance his capping criteria. On 31 October, however, he stated that he would not publish them in advance. The Secretary of State should have told the House why he was wobbling on this important issue. His indecision is not conducive to good government, either local or national. I hope that Ministers will respond to these questions, to which the countries and districts want an answer.

The counties are uneasy about having to face up to the impending pay settlements for teachers, firemen and the police. The legislative challenge of the national curriculum, community care and the Children Act 1989 is severe for our county authorities. The comunity charge for standard spending of £228 is a fiction. The Government have underfunded for pay awards, inflation and new central Government pressures. However, the poll tax is up and running and the Government are attempting to sweeten it. We can see that they are preparing for a general election.

I vividly remember the Secretary of State for the Environment making his Back-Bench speech during the Second Reading of the poll tax Bill. He said that it would be called a Tory tax. Of course it is a Tory tax. It is also an unjust tax. The poll tax has no support in Wales. It affronts our sense of fair play because it is unrelated to the ability to pay. Whatever the Government do, the people of Wales will reject the poll tax. No amount of finesse and no amount of repackaging will hide its glaring inadequacies and injustices. Labour Members pledge to abolish the poll tax. The incoming Labour Government will abolish the poll tax in Wales.

10.53 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): No one can deny that my right hon. Friend's settlement, announced last week, was the most appropriate and generous settlement for Wales. It was remarkably generous. The community charge was introduced only last year. It led to understandable confusion, due to the change from an old system, however discredited, to something new and different. Almost every local council in Wales took advantage of that change by imposing community charges that were far higher than necessary.

Has my right hon. Friend set an increase based on his level for last year or even the year before? If he had increased his settlement for last year by 9·5 per cent. in line with inflation or 20 per cent. from two years before, local councils would need to be instituting substantial cuts in their budgets. Instead, my right hon. Friend has allowed an 8 per cent. increase on their budgets—not their spending—when he knows that those budgets were already set way too high. One leading Labour politician said to me recently that even he cannot understand how some Labour councils have increased their budgeting and levied the community charges that they have. They are not able to spend it.

I wonder if the cynical manipulation of the community charge to which the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) referred applies to the capital city of Wales —Cardiff city council. If there was any foundation in what the hon. Gentleman was trying to claim about district councils' needs, how could Cardiff city council, probably the most left-wing council in the Principality, move to cut the community charge?

Is it cynical to suggest that the sole motivation for the left-wing councillors running Cardiff city council is that they are running scared? They know that the elections will be held in May this year. They know that they took too much off the people of Cardiff last year and they are desperate to give it back, despite all the claims of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that district councils need to levy more in the community charge. Left-wing Cardiff city council is letting him down.

I feel sure that the councils in Wales know what a friend they have in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We should all applaud my right hon. Friend's community charge reduction scheme, providing a threefold increase in the amount of money devoted to the scheme and extending it to cover 1·4 million people in Wales. At last the people of Wales know that someone is fighting back against the impositions of the local councils.

I must tell my right hon. Friend that there are already complaints about his community charge reduction scheme. People beyond those whom he has brought in want his protection against the impositions of the local councils. Already there is a grab-back going on in Wales. My right hon. Friend has announced an excellent reduction scheme, but certain local councils are seeing the opportunity to grab that money back. Once again, the example is close to home. South Glamorgan council, again a left-wing council, controlled solely by the Labour party, is proposing an increase in the community charge of double the rate of inflation. That is totally unjustified, but I am afraid that there is not the cautionary factor of the elections this year. It is insulated from that for another two years.

The real answer to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been trying to deal with is to get the local authorities in Wales to set reasonable community charge levels. Again I shall cite a local example because I know it best. The Welsh Office has calculated that, on the best estimates available, the community charge in Cardiff should be about £100 less than is being levied to maintain the services. Every citizen in the capital of Wales is having to pay an extra £100, and it looks like that will get worse rather than better because of the decisions of the left-wing councillors.

The community charge is much fairer than the rating system it replaced, but we all know the practical problems and the way in which left-wing councils have sought to exploit them. I am coming round to the conclusion that, whatever changes or reductions are made in the community charge, there is a need for far greater accountability by the councils which make the decisions about the level of the community charge.

It is difficult to pursue that accountability with the confusion for the electorate of two tiers of local government. I would welcome moves in the next Parliament towards establishing one tier. Rather than having council elections once every four years, one third of councillors should be re-elected each year. Wales has led the way in proving that accountability works. We have had two examples of electors choosing to abolish community councils because they were not delivering what those electors had a right to expect.

10.59 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I was taught that a good sermon has three points, not 10 as the Secretary of State made. I shall make three points.

First, Conservative Members have preached the sermon that one does not throw bad money at a bad case. The Government have been throwing large sums at trying to make a fatally flawed tax scheme work. I intervened on the Secretary of State briefly and mentioned two of the communities that I represent, the Gurnos and Gellideg estates. By any criteria, they are not well-off, middle-class estates. Many of their residents will get relief from the poll tax reduction scheme, but many husbands and wives—average families—will pay much more than they paid under the old rating system, despite the fact that this system is supposed to be well targeted. The system fails because targeting cannot relieve the fatally flawed nature of the tax—one that drags more and more people into taxation.

Time and again, Chancellors of the Exchequer have sought to remove people from marginal personal and national taxation. The poll tax scheme drags more and more people into marginal taxation under the specious concept of accountability. It drags in young students and makes them pay £40, but then other people spend half their life chasing them to find out where they live and what they do. It brings into taxation people who should be excluded. Governments of both parties have raised thresholds to take people out of taxation, but this tax system drags a whole host of people back into taxation at local level.

My second point is on the scheme's impact on local expenditure. The Government say that huge sums are being spent on local government. During the past 10 years of Thatcherite government, the Government have devised

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

means of spending money in any way but through local authorities. It has been a deliberate policy, and I understand the argument for it. They have created agencies and other means of spending money to do the things that local authorities were supposed to do. We now have housing associations, the Welsh Development Agency—

Mr. Alan Williams: Quangos.

Mr. Rowlands: Yes, quangos.

Money has been made available, so I am not complaining about the impact that that public expenditure has had in my constituency. The Secretary of State testified to the quality of Welsh local government, but why is it that in my community the pavements are cracked, there are potholes in the streets and the street lighting is as bad, as it has ever been, if not worse? The local infrastructure, which is the responsibility of local government, is in a shabby and deplorable state.

I do not believe that it is the fault of local government. The right hon. Gentleman says that large sums of money have been spent. He has testified to the fact that local government is not inefficient and is not wasting huge sums of money. At best, he can claim that there are margins for improvement. Why, despite all this, has there been such an environmental impact at local level? We all know about the condition of pavements and street lighting. Why are the fundamental facilities now shabbier and dirtier than they were more than a decade ago?

I come now to my third point. I do not know what impact recession has on local government expenditure. In recent weeks, the Secretary of State has taken some curious cold comfort from the indication that the recession is hitting the south-east harder than it is hitting Wales. Let me tell him that the recession is biting deeply and radically into the communities that I represent. It affects pits, which are being closed, deep navigation facilities and employment. It gives me no pleasure—indeed, it is horrifying—to have to say that it seems that 1991 will be much like 1981.

There will be other debates about the general economic scene. I do not know what effect recession, with the loss of jobs and of purchasing power, will have on local government services. I do not quite understand how the Government have built revenue support into their settlement factor. Rapidly deepening recession is hitting the economy and jobs in communities like mine.

In respect of all three points, the right hon. Gentleman may say, "I have fought well. I have managed to cushion the worse effects of this tax." It is the silliest tax ever to have been imposed on people. The Secretary of State ought to wake up to the fact that our communities are now deeply in recession and that we need his voice on economic policies as much as on local government finance.

11.7 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): If there is anything that could reconcile me to poll tax, it is the synthetic indignation of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and the sheer dishonesty of the Labour party in claiming that it could abolish the tax overnight. Everybody knows perfectly well that it will not be done in one year. Nor can the dazzling display of the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box conceal the fact that this system is as abstruse as any that went before it. It is with all due respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) that I say that it is not noticeably more effective in making councils responsible to their electorates.

Within the unacceptably tight limits of this still less than satisfactory system, my right hon. Friend has managed to secure a very good deal for Wales. I doubt whether even my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) could have done better—and there is no higher praise than that to bestow. However, the borough of Colwyn feels that it has done badly out of this settlement. I know that a number of communities within the borough have done very well, but they are mostly the sparsely populated ones. Apart from Betws-yn-Rhos, they are the ones outside my constituency. The formula seems to have worked to the disadvantage of the rest.

There was a good deal of force in the remarks of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). He made the point that directing the relief at communities rather than at individuals produces pretty severe anomalies. Nonetheless, I accept my right hon. Friend's assurance that, anomalies or not, the system overall has worked out better for Wales than for England.

I have no doubt that the poll tax is dead and that we shall have to forgo the pleasure of kicking it, at least in so far as it is the principal element in locally raised finance. I also have no doubt that we must go back to a property tax that is easy to collect, has some rough correspondence with ability to pay and encourages the full use of living space. There is a valid theoretical argument for keeping a flat-rate charge to bring home the cost of the things for which people vote so blithely, but the question is whether it is worth the cost just to prove the point.

It is important that whatever new system of local government finance we have, we should try now to move away from the built-in tension between central and local government which is so endemic in the present system. That suggests to me that the state should move in the direction of paying for the services that are basically national services, such as education, the police and the fire services, and that local services should be paid for by local taxation which local authorities are free to raise and to spend entirely as they see fit.

The present in-built tensions are having some bad results. Councils take bad decisions not only because they are misguided, but sometimes purely to be able to blame central Government. The ruling Labour group on Clwyd county council, for example, proposes to sell off Bodelwyddan castle. I know that that is not a money spinner, but it brings much needed investment into the area and it confers huge prestige. It is far easier to shift the blame for that on to central Government and thereby to evade the unpopularity of cutting some of the swollen administrative staff.

I will vote for a reprieve for the poll tax in Wales tonight, as I did for England, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will not take it as a sign that I have changed my mind about the tax. It is merely a token of the high regard that I have for him and of the high esteeem in which I hold the Government under their new management.

11.11 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): This debate is about a failed scheme. We all know that the poll tax has utterly failed. The debate is also a commentary on the Government's failure to keep inflation down and on the problems that stem from that, which run back into local government. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was right when he said that the country was in deep recession. I am one of 10 hon. Members who used to work for Imperial Chemical Industries and we meet the chairman every year. This December, he told us that the recession in late 1990 was just as deep as the recession in 1981 and he was full of foreboding about economic prospects for 1991. That is the background against which we are trying to operate local government.

Some councils feel that the deal is better than they had originally feared in that it is based on current spending rather than on budgeted spending by local authorities. However, the problem is the old one of inflation and of the relationship between inflation and what the Secretary of State has on offer. What he has on offer is sometimes too simplistic, in that it is a straight 8 per cent. It is really a 6 per cent. allowance for inflation plus 2 per cent. for some growth. Against the background of inflation hovering around 10 per cent., that is not acceptable for councils. They are confronted with a shortfall in relation to inflation and they have to find the difference. Their expenditure has to be committed to the most prominent spending priorities and the greatest in most counties is education.

The teachers' pay award is coming up and it is likely —and rightly—to be about 10 per cent. Within that, a hangover of pay increases from the previous year's increments has to be included. Most county councils feel that they will have to find 10·5 per cent. for teachers' pay. They will have to find the difference between 8 and 10·5 per cent.

In my county of Powys, school transport forms 10 per cent. of the education budget. That is twice the administration costs of the education department in the county. In the next 12 months we are likely to see a 20 per cent. increase in school transport costs, based on a present cost of £2·5 million. That matter is not properly taken into account in the Secretary of State's allowances. What allowance has the Secretary of State made for increased costs as a result of Government legislation over the past 12 months in particular? For example, I refer to the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and their provisions for the disabled. The litter code has already been mentioned. In my area, the additional on-costs of that legislation amount to about £1·2 million. I should like to know whether proper allowance for this has been made within the revenue support grant calculations.

To some community councils, the transitional relief and the community charge reduction scheme is helpful—certainly in my area, where some remote community councils have a substantial reduction, although it produces some rather odd inequities. One can liken it to rugby scores—Merthyr Cynog 50, Brecon nil; Llanbadarn Fynydd 33, Llandridnod Wells nil. In such communities, the ability to pay does not make much sense because many people with the least ability to pay are getting no relief. Hon. Members' comments about targeting individuals rather than communities make some sense in these circumstances.

Most charge payers—certainly in Brecon and Radnor —will pay more poll tax than they did last year as a result of the situation that is emerging, in spite of the Secretary of State trying to adjust a failed system.

Housing in the districts and boroughs is critical. Repair costs are mounting. However, councils have a much reduced if not non-existent role in the building of houses. When one examines the situation in Wales—Tai Cymru has funding allocations over the past 12 months, with a target of 3,000 houses to be built—one can see that it is totally inadequate. At least 7,000 affordable houses should be built per year, but allocations to housing associations are inadequate. Some housing associations have been discriminated against by the Welsh Office. That matter should be put right. Funding for local authority housing used to feature strongly in revenue support grant settlements in the past.

The non-domestic business rate has undoubtedly been a disaster for small businesses. In my area, shops are closing—some have been closed for the past six months —as a result of the burden of the non-domestic rate. The Secretary of State has increased it by more than 10 per cent., and that is hard to justify, because it is killing many small businesses.

Which councils is the Secretary of State thinking of capping? I hope none. However, we deserve some indication of his thoughts on this matter in relation to possible increases in poll tax in certain districts. Will he take action, given that councils are trying to operate a failed system? Poll tax payers are undoubtedly paying vastly more than they paid under the rating system.

The poll tax is clearly a complete disaster and should be abolished at the earliest possible moment. What we have heard this evening is just fiddling around with this failed system of the poll tax. It must be replaced by a system based on ability to pay. That means, in our case, the introduction of a local income tax based on people's ability to pay; this would do the job and exclude such people as students, who very often cannot afford to pay even the 20 per cent. poll tax. As I indicated in my question to the Secretary of State earlier, the administration costs of that 20 per cent. tax frequently exceed its value. Indeed, it costs councils to collect it.

So we believe that a fairer system has to be introduced at the earliest possible moment. It is at least pleasing to note that the Government are listening to people with ideas, and we hope that they will come up with ideas for a better solution of the problem, since the poll tax has clearly failed the nation.

11.20 pm

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Grist: Hon. Members say, "Hear, hear," but I do not know whether they will particularly like what I have to say. Nevertheless, such a reception is always welcome.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) rather agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) when he complained about the

[Mr. Grist]

cost of education. I have believed for a long time that it should be on the national rather than the local budget, for the reasons that my hon. Friend put forward.

I should like to welcome the most impressive settlement which my hon. Friend has managed to squeeze out of the Department of the Environment and the Treasury. I think that he did it just in time; if it had come subsequently, things might have been more difficult. The centre of Cardiff, and most particularly the older areas of Cardiff and the three old wards in the centre which lie in my constituency, have benefited hugely from this new community charge reduction scheme. I am most grateful for that, and I know that my constituents will be as well.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) said, if it is not being too cynical—but we are all politicans—Cardiff city council managed to increase its expenditure by 20 per cent. two years ago and raided the balances. That was one thing. Then it increased expenditure by 30 per cent. this year and blamed the community charge. And, lo and behold, this coming year, which is election year, it is to cut it. That is, of course, precisely what we said would be done. It has acted in line with what we said, so I suppose we should not complain, but I do not see why we should not complain, since this is the most mischievous piece of politicking with local people's money.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and to some extent the hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Brecon and Radnor, complained about non-domestic rates. Those rates reflect the changes in valuations since 1973. They do not raise more money than would have been raised otherwise under the rating system. So this is a reallocation through revaluation, and people should not complain about that. If they really wanted the old rates, they could have had revaluation on housing, and I do not think that people would like that very much either, seeing the amount of house improvement that has gone on since 1973.

Of course, the complaint about 10·9 per cent. is a complaint about the current inflation rate, and that is coming down. That is why the increased expenditure available to councils through the allowances this year will be greater than the rate of inflation throughout the coming 12 months. That is the answer to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor. It is not good enough to take the highest rate in one particular year; one has to take the average throughout the year, in which councils play a major part through their negotiations on pay rates. That is something to which they in turn must pay a great deal of attention.

The county council in South Glamorgan is putting up its community charge by twice the current inflation rate, and therefore by more than the future one, raising the community charge by £38. So between the reduction in the city and the increases in the county, some will be paying more, but some, because of the kindness of the city council and because of this new community charge reduction rate, will be paying less. I hope that, after they look at their new bills, people will be able to work out precisely what is going on.

The new system, whatever else may be said about it, is a great deal easier to understand than the old one. I do not believe that many hon. Members really understood the old rating system and the rate support grant. When I joined the Welsh Office, I was given a little booklet to help me to understand it. There was an article in *The Economist* at the time entitled "The rates made easy—honestly." I got halfway through it and crumbled.

Unlike the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, I believe that everyone should at least attempt to make some contribution towards their local authority's expenditure, which is made on their behalf and that of the local community, whether it be £1, £2, £3, £4 or £5 a week —which is what people in Wales are asked to spend on average.

That is not an unreasonable charge. Let us take my two young sons, who live in my house. Why should I pay the rates while they live there for nothing? They are earning. They have no other responsibilities. I do not see why they should not make a contribution, whatever one may say about the present system. The principle that they and other people should contribute to their local authority is perfectly reasonable.

However, in the review being carried out, I should like to see some form of flat-rate payment allied to a return to some form of property tax. The reason is simple. Houses do not move around. Although the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) told me otherwise, even local income tax has that drawback. People move around and are a little tricky to trace, keep track of and follow. I am not a great believer in that system.

Nor am I a believer in using capital values of housing as the basis for local taxation. In the past year, we have seen differential falls in the value of housing. Some of the crazy ideas for basing capital values on the last sale price are as daft as they sound. I would not go along with them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North supported the idea of creating unitary authorities. I believe in the two-tier principle. I always have. Not least in Wales, unitary authorities would not be appropriate. In order to have a worthwhile size of population and accumulation of finance, we should have to have the most enormous authorities in mid and north Wales, or we would have over-large unitary authorities which were not properly local but were not large enough to carry out strategic planning in their own right. There would have to be another body above it, which might, of course, be called Parliament but nevertheless would be a further power removed from the locality.

I see the future as a two-tier system and a partial return to the old system, incorporating the principles of the present system. There should be minimum disruption. We have had quite enough disruption. The new review should produce a minimum of disruption and lead to a system which is clearer than the old one but will be perhaps a little more four square.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon) *rose*——

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I call Mr. Alun Michael.

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Do you not intend to call members of all parties to speak in this Welsh debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I am concerned that all parties, particularly

minority parties, should have a voice in the House. But the debate is in the hands of hon. Members who have already spoken from both the Front and Back Benches and the time that they take. I understand that the Front-Bench Members seek to reply to the debate. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has risen, and I have called him.

Mr. Michael *rose*——

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that is not acceptable. Every party in Wales that is represented in the House should have an opportunity to speak in a debate which is so important to the people of Wales. One and a half hours on matters of critical importance to the poll tax payers of Wales is simply not acceptable——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate how important the matter is to the people of Wales and the hon. Members who represent them, but it is not for the Chair to determine the length of debates in the House. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has sought to catch my eye so that he can reply to the debate. I call Mr. Alun Michael.

Mr. Wigley: It is up to the Chair to decide which hon. Members are called and in what order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have decided whom I am calling. I call Mr. Alun Michael.

Mr. Wigley: I am not prepared to accept that. It is in your hands to decide in which order you choose hon. Members to speak. It is within your capability to allow every party——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I require the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I call Mr. Alun Michael.

Mr. Wigley: No, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Alun Michael: This is self-indulgent.

Mr. Wigley: It is not self-indulgent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I require the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. Wigley *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am requiring the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. Wigley: I am surprised, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you should take that view——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am requiring the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. Is he prepared to resume his seat?

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Is he prepared to resume his seat?

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry——

Madam Deputy Speaker: If not, I am going to ask him to remove himself from the Chamber for the remainder of today's debate.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. Wigley *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to do me the courtesy of resuming his seat. If not, I will ask him to remove himself from the Chamber for the remainder of this day's sitting.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret to do it, but if the hon. Gentleman will not resume his seat——

Mr. Wigley *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to remove himself from the Chamber for the remainder of this day's sitting.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. Wales has a right to be heard——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to leave the Chamber for the remainder of this day's session.

Mr. Wigley: Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. On this point of order, I am attempting to be as fair as possible in the Chair. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to do the honourable thing to his colleagues in the House and to the Chair. If he will not resume his seat, I am asking him to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Wigley: Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Name him."] I do not wish to name the hon. Gentleman. I am simply asking him either to resume his seat so that we can get on with the debate, which has about 16 minutes left, or to leave the Chamber. Will the hon. Gentleman resume his seat? I call Mr. Alun Michael.

11.31 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is easy to understand the frustration of hon. Members who are unable to take part in the debate. I must make the point that hon. Members on the Conservative Benches have had their time. Many of my hon. Friends have been equally frustrated by the shortness of the debate.

The debate has proved that, squirm as the Conservatives may, it is crystal clear that the settlement is completely inadequate to allow local authorities in Wales to deliver the services that their communities have a right to expect and that it forces an increase in poll tax levels.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) should understand better than most how unsatisfactory the settlement is. His loyalty is greater than his sense, and greater than the sense that he has shown in previous contributions, although I note that he has come some way —a little belatedly—to meet the Labour party's proposal to replace the poll tax.

The Secretary of State for Wales tells us that an increase, as he calls it, which amounts to 8 per cent. above last year's budget levels, is good for Wales. That is nonsense, although the position is even worse for English authorities which are offered the more derisory increase of 7 per cent. It does not even cover inflation. He then had the cheek to growl at Welsh local authorities as if he had been

[Mr. Alun Michael]

generous, and as if it would be ungrateful of them not to stick to the unrealistic poll tax levels which he has demanded.

Let me cut through all the jargon and set the record straight with four statements that do not brook argument. First, local authorities in Wales set reasonable budgets, according to the Government's own criteria. For 1990-91, English local authorities set levels that average 12·3 per cent. above their standard spending assessments. That is 12·3 per cent. above the level that the Government recognise that councils need to spend. In Wales, they went only 5·7 per cent. above the level that the parsimonious Government recognise as essential. Welsh counties as a whole were only 4 per cent. over their level.

In case the Secretary of State is tempted to follow the line urged on him by the backwoods warrior, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), who ought to know better, let him consider that last year South Glamorgan was only 2·9 per cent. above its SSA—a remarkable achievement. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North criticised that county for its proposal to increase the poll tax for 1991-92, but it allows for spending at a level only 0·9 per cent.—less than 1 per cent.—above standard spending assessment. So it is closer to the Government's target than last year.

It is even closer to the target that the Secretary of State for Wales, at the Dispatch Box, praised fulsomely as being fair and reasonable. As his own words proved, a prudent and responsible authority is being forced by the Minister's parsimony to raise its poll tax. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North should be fighting for his constituents instead of fawning on the Secretary of State. That illustrates the dilemma for councils throughout Wales, which are desperate to keep down the burden on their own people.

Secondly, it is the Government who are failing to pull their weight and pay their fair share of the bill. In 1981-82, the Government met 73·4 per cent. of local authority expenditure. After their onslaught on local councils year after year, that has been cut ruthlessly. In 1991-92, the figure will be down to about 58 per cent. That is why councils have to consider increasing their poll tax levels, despite having increased efficiency, despite having pruned the dead wood and despite having cut services in recent years. Ministers know that that is a simple fact, which is why tonight's statement by the Secretary of State, the right hon. Gentleman's press releases and the words of his Back Benchers amount to gross misrepresentation.

Thirdly, the Government have heaped additional responsibilities and burdens on local authorities without providing them with the resources necessary to do the job. Several have been mentioned tonight. They include local management of schools, the national curriculum, care in the community, the demands of the Children Act 1989, and the demands of other authorities—I would cite the inadequate increase in the police authority budget—over which local authorities have no control. They also include housing benefit administration and the loss of interest to local authorities due to the changeover from rates to poll tax—a loss of £1 million this year to Cardiff city council alone. They include the costs of competition, which this crazy Government have forced on local authorities and of implementing the environment legislation. On top of all those and more, there is the homelessness to which my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) referred. Frankly, the financial burden of the Government's failure to allow councils to provide housing for rent falls on poll tax payers as surely as the personal burden of misery falls on the homeless themselves.

My fourth statement is simple: the Secretary of State's relief scheme is absolutely crazy. In his statement tonight, the right hon. Gentleman said that more poll tax payers will get a reduction. That is a distortion. What it means is that still more people will get a softening to the edge with which this silly and unfair tax cuts into their standard of living.

How the Minister has arrived at the relief levels for different communities in Wales is a mystery. He has deepened that mystery by failing to seek the advice of local councils and, as a result, the anomalies are ludicrous.

In Cardiff, for instance, an individual living in the community of Adamsdown gets relief of £86. That is reasonable. But an individual in the community of Butetown—the most deprived community in Wales, on a whole range of factors—gets a miserable £5. The Riverside community, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), has its social problems, but a well-off individual in a large valuable house near the top of Cathedral road gets the same relief —£50—as someone in the deprived parts of that ward. Someone on the Llanrumney estate gets only £23. Someone in St. Donats gets £59. Where is the sense or reason in that?

The scheme is equally nonsensical elsewhere in Wales —and I have looked at the figures for the areas that I know well. In Colwyn bay, one gets just £3, whether one is rich or poor. In Petrefoelas, one gets £87. In Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, one gets only £1. In every community in the Rhondda, one gets the same—£81. In the Ringland area of Newport, one gets only £3.

Take the village where my grandmother was born. If one lives in Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant in Glyndwyr, one gets £107, but if one lives in Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant in Montgomeryshire, one gets only £18. I know that there are virtues in living in that area, but such anomalies are crazy. To take the words of the Secretary of State for Wales, "Some system—some targeting." This mess has been created because the Minister wants to get over the unpalatable fact that the poll tax cannot be made fair.

The Secretary of State claims that, in reviewing the poll tax, he will consider the interest of the people of Wales. That is patently false, because the interests of the Welsh people have been clear from the beginning and the will of the people of Wales is absolutely clear: they and we want the right hon. Gentleman to swallow his pride and get rid of the poll tax for once and for all.

The settlement is financially inadequate. It is mere tinkering, which makes the system even more ludicrous and unfair for the local authorities and people of Wales.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Nicholas Bennett.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Under-Secretary of State will be the fourth Conservative Member for Wales to speak in this debate. Not a single Member of my party has been called, and that is a disgrace. Will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, suggest to the Under-Secretary that, in the spirit of fairness which the House should uphold, he

forgoes his opportunity to reply and allows my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) to make his contribution?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Under-Secretary of State has heard the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

11.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): I should have liked to respond to the request of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), but unfortunately it is my responsibility——

Mr. Rogers: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) is wrong. The Under-Secretary of State will be the fifth Conservative Member to be called and, considering the strength of support for the Conservative party among the population in Wales, it is deplorable that so many should be called.

Mr. Bennett: I wish that other Labour Members had been as numerate as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) in their contributions to the debate.

During the past two years Labour Members have adopted two approaches to local government finance. Out of office, year after year they have always said that the rate support grant is inadequate and underfunded. But in office the story is different. If one goes back—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like the Government looking at their record as opposed to their promises. In 1975——

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it within your power to direct the Under-Secretary of State to keep to the matter in hand—local government finance under the Government?

Mr. Bennett: It is interesting that Labour Members prefer us not to look at their policies in government, but would rather talk about their policies for the future. If one looks at debates on RSG from 1974 to 1979, there was no mention then of inadequate or insufficient funding——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This has nothing to do with the motion. The Under-Secretary of State is referring to Labour party policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Minister, who has very little time left, will refer to the motion.

Mr. Bennett: It is clear that the Opposition do not want to hear the facts. Let me give them. Under the previous Labour Government, we saw no increases in local government spending, only reductions. In 1976-77, local government spending was reduced by 4 per cent. The following year, it went down by 8 per cent. In their last year in office, it went down by a further 4 per cent. That is the Labour party's record. We need no lectures about local government spending from a party that consistently cut local authority spending in each year that it held office.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), in a speech which piled cliché on to cliché, said that his authorities had seen an increase in spending of only £13,000. That is not correct. The aggregate external finance figure for Alyn and Deeside for the coming year shows an extra £456,000—8·4 per cent. The hon. Gentleman preferred not to look at the complete figures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), in a sensible speech, fought for his constituents against the way in which Cardiff and South Glamorgan have increased year on year their spending regardless of what the charge payer can pay. If one looks at the figures for different authorities, one sees some appalling increases. Neath has increased spending by more than 70 per cent. in the past three years. That is the sort of problem that we have in local authorities throughout Wales. All they think about is whether they can rake in some more money from the community charge payer, and they do so without any thought for the charge payers themselves.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No, I will not.

Time and time again, Labour Members say that the non-domestic rate is too high, the community charge is too high and Government spending is too low. But we hear nothing about what they would do if they were in office. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside simply said that the Labour party would abolish the poll tax in Wales. There was then a deathly silence, and he sat down. When the hon. Gentleman held my place at the Dispatch Box in 1974, he said that the rating system was an anomaly and should be abolished. We discover now that Labour wants to return to a property tax—to the very system which, up to three years ago, the Opposition considered so unfair. Labour's problem is that it has no policies.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the Minister is concentrating on matters more appropriate to the history classroom, should not he declare an interest, as a history teacher, before he entered Parliament?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is hardly a point of order.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman may therefore rest assured that the facts that I put before the House are correct.

Mr. Win Griffiths: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Member sure that it is a point of order and not a debating point?

Mr. Griffiths: I am not 100 per cent. certain—which is why I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to inform the House whether you have any control over all those present in the Chamber, because during the Minister's speech, six of the eight experts in the Box occupied by civil servants left because they could not stand what the Minister was saying.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Admissions to, and exits from, the Chamber have nothing to do with me—other than in the case of those whom I name.

Mr. Bennett: I do not need experts in responding to the debate, because I have the information that I need at my fingertips.

This generous settlement——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER,

[Mr. Bennett]

pursuant to the Order [25 January] to put the Questions necessary to dispose of the motion, and of the other motion relating to Local Government Finance (Wales).

Division No. 51] **[11.46 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John D. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret

Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1991-92 (House of Commons Paper No. 78), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 79), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

Resolved,

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 2) (House of Commons Paper No. 80), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

PETITION

Sowerby Bridge Fire Station

11.58 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Nearly 3,000 citizens of Sowerby Bridge have signed a petition protesting at the proposed closure of their fire station which is a direct result of the Government's poll tax and the entirely inadequate standard spending assessment. In my opinion, the closure will lead to a risk of loss of life and damage to property; it is completely unacceptable to my constituents and I urge the House not to accept it.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a motion of no confidence in the Chair has been tabled, can you tell me at what stage it will be taken?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I am unable to answer the hon. Gentleman's question at this stage. I have only just learnt that a motion of no confidence has been tabled.

Juveniles (Detention)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.59 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): Last July, a 15-year-old boy, Philip Knight, killed himself while on remand in Swansea prison. His case, though tragic, is, sadly, not unique. However, he was the youngest child ever to commit suicide while detained in prison. His avoidable death brought the scandalous practice of remanding juveniles in adult prisons to the attention of the public.

Last year, nine young men under the age of 21 committed suicide while on remand. Everyone—the press, the media and the Government—said that it must never happen again. The Government announced that they intended to change the system. Last Friday, however, another 15-year-old boy was remanded in Swansea prison, a prison for adults. Why?

Last year, 1,613 15 to 16-year-old boys were on remand in adult prisons. The suicide rate among all remand prisoners is very high. The young, as we have learnt, are no exception. Fifty-five per cent. of all suicides in prison are committed by prisoners on remand. Of the 1,613 untried and unsentenced juveniles in prison or remand centres, the prison department's statistics do not account for 357 cases. I could not trace what happened to them; nor could the prison department. Of the remaining 1,256 cases, 41 per cent. were found to be not guilty or were given non-custodial sentences. That is a very high percentage of all the young people who have been on remand in adult prisons.

Hon. Members are aware that draft legislation is currently being considered in Committee to amend and reform the law relating to the treatment of juvenile offenders and others. I had hoped that it would provide the opportunity to bring about radical changes to a system that is designed to deal more with the hardened criminal than with a particularly vulnerable section of the community—young people charged with but not yet found guilty of various offences.

We have now had the chance to examine the proposals in detail and to listen to comments and criticisms from a large number of organisations concerned with young people. The criticisms from a wide range of professional and other organisations have been overwhelming. All agree that the Bill's provisions do not meet the challenge posed by young men on remand in adult prisons. Some people believe that the Government are operating a dual agenda, giving the signal of great public concern about what is happening, but not meeting their obligations or their promise to tackle the problem.

The conditions in which juveniles are remanded in custody are usually much worse than those of youngsters who have been sentenced and who are in young offenders' institutions. Their conditions of imprisonment are among the worst to be found in the penal system. Overcrowded and insanitary conditions prevail. Bullying and intimidation are rife. Prison staff tell us that the necessary specialist training to deal with these often distressed youngsters is not available. We are all aware now, if we were not before, of what can happen when cries for help, in the form of self-mutilation, rule-breaking and so on, are misinterpreted or ignored. Many of these young men and women —many of them children—are emotionally unstable.

A recent prison board report dealing with B wing of Hull prison said:

"The hospital staff have had to deal with an upsurge of self-mutilation and the swallowing of various objects, such as radio batteries, almost entirely from inmates of B wing. The reasons are various—attention seeking, immaturity, depression, poor conditions leading to protest action and a desire to get away from the prison to perceived sympathetic attitudes in the local NHS hospital where surgery is involved. It is largely because of the vigilance of the wing and hospital staff and the treatment available that a fatal consequence has so far been avoided. Unless there are improvements in B wing, it is likely that sooner or later there will be a death."

If we accept, as we do, the principle that a person is innocent until proved guilty, it is reasonable to expect that the conditions in which someone is remanded should be at least as good as, if not better than, anything that can be found elsewhere in the penal system. That is clearly not the case.

The Government say that they are aware of all this and that we need more secure units and more specialist juvenile remand centres, all of which cost money. They argue that the answer lies in privatisation and they quote the American model where it is claimed that the private sector helps to supplement the state penal settlement by running its own secure institutions.

We are talking about less than half of 1 per cent. of the American prison population, and I challenge the view that a consortium led by Kentucky Fried Chicken, which I understand is involved, is the sort of organisation with appropriate experience in the sensitive area of juvenile offenders. I understand that the Government have put out to tender the new juvenile remand centre at Everthorpe on Humberside. If I am wrong, I hope that the Minister will tell me.

It is recognised that trained specialist staff are needed to help young people on remand to come to terms with their situation.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): My hon. Friend may not be aware of some of the results of the American privatisation of prisons. Some valuable research was carried out successfully in the American prison service on the reduction of suicides among prisoners, using the counselling of fellow prisoners. When inquiries were made about that detailed research, the information was refused on the grounds that it was copyright.

Ms. Lestor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information.

We need to help youngsters to face the consequences of their actions and make plans for their future when it is found necessary to remand them. There must be proper recognition of the problems facing youngsters when they leave remand to return to the outside world. Many have no homes to go to, no jobs to support them and no family to fall back on. It is clearly an inadequate and short-sighted response to turn the key and with it turn our backs on their lives.

Ian McKinley was transferred from Strangeways prison to Hindley. He spent the whole seven weeks between his transfer and his death in solitary confinement. During that time, he was never assessed for suicide risks by a doctor, nor was he seen by a psychiatrist. That was clearly a completely inadequate response to his needs.

Prison officers are left to do a skilled social worker's job, keeping an eye out for the potential suicide. When things go wrong, there is no formal post-trauma counselling, although after Strangeways there are ideas afoot to formalise some form of counselling system, which is long overdue.

The Prison Officers Association quotes an example of one officer at Armley who was in trauma after cutting down the bodies of two juveniles who had hanged themselves one night. He was not even given a rest period to come to terms with what he had witnessed. Instead, he was put to work acting as letter censor, with a brief to look carefully for any signs in the letters that more prisoners might be suicidal. That is a terrible way to treat someone who had just been through that appalling experience.

Just as there are good and bad Members of Parliament, so there are good and bad prison officers. Time and again, the Prison Officers Association has argued the case for better training, clearer guidelines and more resources. It recognises that its members are neither psychiatrists nor social workers, yet skills and responsibilities associated with those professions are expected of them and when things go wrong—as we know, they can go horribly wrong—the gross insensitivity towards individual officers leaves one breathless.

There were three juvenile suicides in Hindley remand centre last year, one in February and two in June. The same two prison officers appeared at both inquests. Neither had received post-trauma counselling, or any suicide prevention training. No doubt many of the prison officers carry a great deal of guilt with them. They should not because it is not their fault, but that is what happens. The young female officer who discovered Philip Knight's body—the 15-year-old boy—was not given leave to attend his inquest. She had received no counselling, and the Prison Officers Association thought that attendance at the inquest might help her. The Home Office refused. It failed to send a representative from its prison department or anyone from senior management at Swansea. Why? What is the argument behind that?

At inquest after inquest, the same issues are raised and each time good sections of the media—newspapers and others—protest. Each time, we are told that action is in the pipeline, but it is not, and that is not good enough.

We must tackle the degrading and dehumanising regime in the remand sector and examine why youngsters are in it in the first place. That includes considering the role of social security legislation, which deprives many 16 and 17-year-olds of some form of financial support, turning them to petty crime and a life on the streets.

We must work more closely with the voluntary agencies that work with vulnerable youngsters on a daily basis. We must examine the use of the unruliness certificate and secure local authority accommodation to identify where improvements can be made. We must not be lulled into accepting privatisation as a reasonable response to the long-term needs of young people, when in reality it is a shortcut to offloading responsibility.

Almost a year ago, we were promised a consultation paper on custodial remands for 15 and 16-year-olds. The Minister of State said in the House on 13 December that we could expect sight of the paper either before Christmas or shortly after. It has yet to materialise. Proposed amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill will not now be available for tabling in Committee, and we shall not be given much time to comment on some of the Bill's more controversial aspects, such as the privatisation of secure units.

[Ms. Lestor]

I have grave doubts about the Government's commitment to reform of this shameful sector of the prison service. Over the years, we have had brought to our notice time and again the tragedies of our young men and children—they are children—who are on remand in adult prisons. I know that in some areas—Swansea is one—there is no alternative, and we must carefully consider that.

Time and again we hear of suicides. The public are outraged that these issues are raised but nothing is done. I am personally outraged, because I believed the Government when they said at the time of Philip Knight's death that it would not happen again, that action would be taken and that proposals would be made. The Criminal Justice Bill is being considered in Committee, but reforms and changes have not been proposed. In December we were promised a consultative paper, but it is yet to materialise.

Public anxiety about remanding juveniles in custody cannot be met by proposals that will merely reduce their number, as some organisations expect to happen, but not end this unacceptable practice. Remanding boys of 15 and 16 to adult prisons is morally indefensible in a civilised society. Nothing short of a total ban on such remands will meet justified public concern. The few young people who must be detained to protect the public should be held in local authority units, not in the conditions that obtain in Victorian prisons.

I said at the beginning of my speech how we were all shocked that a young boy of 15 could kill himself and that many of the young people who have killed themselves have been very young. People on remand, whatever their age, are at their most vulnerable. They do not know what will happen to them and they are plunged into despair and misery. With the best will in the world, our prison system is not geared to coping with such misery, which needs specialist training and far more skills than we give our prison officers. It is not their fault that they do not have the skills or the wherewithal to deal with these young people.

It is important that the Government state their thinking on abolishing this misery for our young men in particular, but also some girls, and what plans they have for fundamental change so that there are no more Philip Knights, no more young men killing themselves in misery because they are remanded in conditions that cannot cope with their needs, where they feel abandoned and where, often, they should not be in the first place. They are not a danger to society. Often, they are disturbed young people with behavioural problems that need specialist training.

12.14 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am aware of the hon. Lady's long-standing interest in these issues, which goes back over many years. She speaks with considerable experience but, like me, she will have learnt not always to trust press speculation about the terrible things that the Government might be about to do. She mentioned the possibility of privatisation in respect of our future provision for juveniles on remand. When we publish our plans in the very near future, she will see that much of what she has read in the newspapers amounts to speculation.

The Criminal Justice Bill is currently being considered in Standing Committee. Indeed, I spent most of today in that Committee. In the Bill, we are making provision to put out to tender the new establishment at Everthorpe, which will actually be called Wolds. It will be a remand prison for adults, not for juveniles. I hope that I have cleared that point up to the hon. Lady's satisfaction. I was anxious to deal with those two matters at the beginning of my speech, as they materially affect the tone of what I am about to say.

The situation should be seen against the background of the fact that the number of juveniles sentenced to custody in this country fell from approximately 8,000 in 1982 to just over 2,000 in 1990. By anyone's standards, that is a considerable reduction. It is to be warmly welcomed, in the sense that it was not paralleled by a rise in juvenile crime. On the contrary, juvenile crime dropped during the 1980s. I think that there is considerable agreement between the political parties that one of the best forms of crime prevention is, if possible, to stop young people going into detention in the first place—in other words, criminal prevention is very much better than crime prevention—except in the case of those very narrow categories of people who, for public protection, have to be in custody.

I should like to deal briefly with that matter before considering the hon. Lady's specific points about remand. There are only limited circumstances in which sentenced juveniles can be held in adult prisons. Most of those still held will be awaiting allocation after having been given a sentence of detention under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. The hon. Lady is very familiar with the workings of that Act and will realise that those young people will have been convicted of the most serious crimes—very often, homicide. Otherwise, the power to hold juveniles temporarily in adult prisons is used very rarely indeed.

The concern of the hon. Lady and of the public, quite rightly, has focused much more on unsentenced juveniles. The hon. Lady may be aware that, in the Criminal Justice Bill that is now being considered in Committee, we are abolishing the sentence of detention of 14-year-olds in young offender institutions. That is another step forward along the road that the hon. Lady and other hon. Members would wish us to take. Concern is not so much now about sentenced juveniles in detention as about unsentenced juveniles in detention and about the conditions in which those juveniles are held. The public are rightly concerned about this, as am I.

The main category of unsentenced juveniles who may be held in prison department custody are 15 and 16-year-old boys refused bail who are certified by the court as being too unruly to be safely remanded to local authority care—the unruliness certificate procedure. In addition, convicted juveniles of both sexes may be remanded in custody to await sentence at the Crown court, but their numbers are small. As with sentenced juveniles, the number of remanded juveniles held in prison department custody is coming down. In 1987, in England and Wales, there were about 1,900 people in that category, and in 1989 about 1,500. I do not yet have the 1990 figures, but I expect that when they are published they will show a further decline. The drop is encouraging, but no one —least of all the Government—wants unconvicted 15 and 16-year-olds to be locked up in adult prisons.

It is a matter of regret that juveniles have to be locked up at all. However, I am afraid to say that, with some juveniles who have been charged with very serious offences or who otherwise pose a risk to the public, it is necessary

to have some secure containment before they come to trial. The hon. Lady will argue that a certain amount of secure containment is available under the child care system. As she knows, standards of security vary a lot around the country. Such accommodation can be used for remanded juveniles, but there are problems. There is limited accommodation. Understandably, local authorities do not have large holdings of vacant accommodation and there are compelling demands on it from within the care system. In addition, under the present law, the courts' power in using secure accommodation is severely limited.

When a court has before it, for example, a juvenile whom it feels needs to be locked up, it has no power to direct that that juvenile should be locked up in secure accommodation. If the court wants to keep the juvenile out of prison department custody, it has to remand him in local authority care and to rely on the sensible discretion of the local authority.

Generally speaking, local authorities exercise sensible discretion. In some parts of the country, they may have erred too much in favour of not exercising the discretion to hold children in secure conditions. In those areas, sentencers have got into the habit of not using local authority accommodation, so people have ended up in prison. I do not know about the position in Swansea, to which the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) referred. I know that, in some parts of the country, there are considerable gaps in provision and we must address ourselves to that.

Under the present system, there is no alternative to a prison department custodial remand for some juveniles. We regret that. We also accept that it is undesirable, and we want to do something about it. We are committed to the objective of ending prison department custodial remand for unsentenced juveniles, as my right hon. and learned Friend the then Home Secretary's White Paper pointed out when it was published last year. My right hon. and learned Friend said on Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill:

"The object is to devise a system that will not result in their going to prison".—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1990; Vol. 181, c. 150.]

He was referring to juveniles.

In our White Paper, "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", we outlined proposals for amending the arrangements for the remand of alleged juvenile offenders under 17. As part of those proposals, we announced our intention to restrict the circumstances in which juveniles can be remanded to adult prisons. We promised a consultation paper, to which the hon. Lady referred; I can understand her impatience at not having seen it.

We have been working hard on developing the proposals on juvenile remand. That has not been easy. There are conflicting demands which need to be balanced. We have had to ask people from the prison department to look at the standards of security in some local authority secure accommodation and we find that security varies widely.

I do not mean that we are considering only matters of containment; we are considering the issues of suicide and self-injury, which can sometimes occur because someone who is contained—whether in a prison cell or in a local authority home—can find something with which to hang or damage himself. Much inspection work has been needed. It is a complex area of law and practice, which is why it has taken us so long to prepare the paper.

The paper is now almost ready, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary hopes to be able to publish it within a week or so. That will mean that it should be available for the Standing Committee on the Criminal Justice Bill in time for it to receive an initial consideration. We shall therefore meet the sole pledge given by my right hon. and learned Friend the then Home Secretary when he said that he would undertake to bring forward the consultation paper while the Criminal Justice Bill was being considered in the House.

As the White Paper made clear, we needed to look at all aspects of the arrangements for juvenile remand. I hope that the House will understand that I cannot go into the details before we publish.

In preparing the consultation paper, we scrutinised the existing framework of law and practice from the point of bail onwards. There have been some encouraging developments, such as the use of bail support schemes for juveniles. I am a strong proponent of the development of bail support schemes for juveniles, in the same way as I think that bail information schemes are valuable for adults in making sure that only those who have to be remanded in custody—there will always be those who have to be remanded in custody before trial—actually get that custody.

Bail support schemes provide a structured programme of activities for and work with young people awaiting trial under very close supervision in the community. On some occasions, that supervision is of such an intensity that it may be no cheaper, and I can imagine that, in certain circumstances, it can be as expensive as remand in prison accommodation. Several schemes already exist in different parts of the country, which show that they can deal properly with remanded juveniles in the community and reduce the need to refuse bail in all but the most serious cases.

I should like bail support schemes to be set up soon in all parts of the country, in the same way as bail information schemes for adults are set up, whereby information is conveyed to the Crown prosecution service to determine whether it is necessary for the Crown prosecution service to press for remand in custody.

We need also carefully to consider the protection of the public and the standard of security that is needed for some of the most disturbed and difficult juveniles who are charged with offences. As always, in trying to balance the public interest, one wishes to do all that one possibly can to help young people who are remanded and awaiting triald, but, at the same time, to guard the public interest. That is the difficult task that Home Office Ministers of whatever political party always have to face.

It is our intention to give effect to the proposals that will be contained in the consultation paper which will be published very shortly in the Criminal Justice Bill, by way of amendment either in Committee or on Report, or in the other place. It will certianly be considered during proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill, and there will be full discussion. There is the proviso that, before we can have those discussions, we must have a reasonable period for consultation, as the hon. Lady said, and consider carefully the comments that we receive.

I hope that, with that undertaking, the hon. Lady, whose frustration at not seeing the consultation paper I fully understand, will feel that the matter is not quite as bleak as it was at 11.59 pm, when we began the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty seven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL

MIDLAND METRO (No. 2) BILL

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 31 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Ur of the Chaldees

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what technical assistance has been provided by Her Majesty's inspectorate of ancient monuments in respect of the preservation of Ur of the Chaldees, and other archaeological/holy places in Iraq; and how many English Heritage experts have visited in the past two years archaeological sites in Mesopotamia.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): None, Sir, on both counts.

Mr. Dalyell: That distinguished scholar Dr. Jacob Saki suggested on Radio 4 on Sunday that damage to Najaf and Karbala in particular, and at other Shi'ite shrines, could create the situation in which Iran would go to the aid of Iraq. Is not the bombing inhuman and counter-productive —and is not it perceived as such from Morocco right down to Malaysia? Should not all bombing be stopped forthwith?

Sir George Young: Before I answer the hon. Gentleman's question, I should tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment cannot be present in the House today as he is representing the United Kingdom at a meeting of Environment Ministers in Paris.

So far, there is no firm evidence of damage done to Iraq, although there is speculation about two buildings in Baghdad. Iraq has caused substantial damage by the wholesale looting of the national museum in Kuwait City, and it inflicted considerable damage on Iran during the Iraq-Iran war. As to the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, he may recall that on 21 January, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that

> "Very clear instructions have gone to our troops to avoid sites of religious and cultural interest."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1991; Vol. 184, c. 26.]

Mr. Adley: Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware that about the only thing that many of us admire about the hon. Gentleman's question is his ability to persuade the Table Office to put it on the Order Paper? Will my hon. Friend thank English Heritage for the help that it extended to Highcliffe castle in Dorset, and if that organisation has any spare funds, will he suggest that that site of historic interest is a more appropriate focus of English Heritage's attention and funds?

Sir George Young: It would certainly be cheaper for English Heritage officials to visit my hon. Friend's constituency than the middle east. I am grateful for his kind comments about the assistance that English Heritage extended to his constituency.

Local Government Finance

2. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to conclude his review of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Our review covers finance, structure and functions of local government, so is necessarily complex. The Government will announce conclusions as soon as they are ready to do so.

Mr. Haynes: That answer is not good enough. I expected to see the organ grinder at the Dispatch Box today, but he is not here, and obviously the junior Minister is answering for him. When will speed become the operative word in informing the House when the review will be finished and what will happen then? Our local authorities are suffering, and we will not have any more of it.

Mr. Portillo: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to be as speedy as possible, but he will recognise that the matter is complex—and perhaps he will welcome the fact that we are dealing with functions, structure and financing together. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spent a considerable amount of time in the Chamber and said then that he hoped to give first indications of our thinking in the spring. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: When my hon. Friend is considering when to come out with the results of his deliberations will he please bear two points in mind? First, as whatever he decides will be with us for many years to come, can he resist the siren voice of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), despite the vigour of his presentation, and ensure that we do not hurry this decision? Secondly, can he please ensure, when he does decide what should be done, that the community charge remains part of it, so that people have to contribute to the local services that they enjoy in some form, however little they earn?

Mr. Portillo: As my hon. Friend says, it would indeed be nice to arrive at a solution that would stand for many years, so that we would not have to have constant change. Sadly, there is a certain amount of disagreement about the hon. Gentleman's second point, but I note his views and I know that many of my hon. Friends take the view that accountability is an important principle, which should remain in any of our new arrangements.

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister confirm that the outcome of his review could well mean that the poll tax remains in place?

Mr. Portillo: It could be that and it could be something different.

Mr. Favell: Whatever else comes out of the review, will my hon. Friend and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State ensure that local authorities remain accountable to the people that they are intended to serve? Local authorities employ one in nine people in this country and, whatever local authorities would have people believe, some give rank bad service—everyone has heard stories of empire building and profligacy.

Mr. Portillo: Yes, I not only agree with my hon. Friend in much of what he says, but I believe that the introduction of the community charge has focused people's attention on the importance of making local authorities accountable. That is why I said, in answer to a previous question, that I believe that that is a principle which many of my hon. Friend"s wish to preserve and defend.

Newcastle upon Tyne Council

3. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effects on the services of Newcastle upon Tyne city council following the financial decisions he has taken for the year 1991-92.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I am satisfied that the settlement decisions are fair and realistic for all authorities. For Newcastle they mean a standard spending assessment of £1,000 per adult. Under our intended capping criteria, an increase in budget next year of up to 9 per cent. would be possible—more than enough for an appropriate level of service.

Mr. Clelland: Is the Minister aware that the standard spending assessment means little for the realistic budgets of local authorities? I am pleased that he nods in agreement with that comment. Is he aware that the city of Newcastle upon Tyne is facing £12·5 million in cuts? Does he imagine that such a sum can be found by making savings on paper clips? If not, can he name one area of the council's activities in which he could save one tenth of that amount? If he cannot answer that question, can he say why the Government should inflict such financial policies on councils, without making any assessment of the effect upon people?

Mr. Key: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern, especiallly for law centres such as Benwell, and I have written to him on the subject. However, it has never been Government policy to tell local authorities how to manage their affairs. The hon. Gentleman invites me to identify areas where savings might be possible. I should be very surprised if there were not some administration areas where savings could be made.

Homelessness

4. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of people sleeping out over the 1990 Christmas period in major cities.

Sir George Young: My Department estimates that there are about 2,000 to 3,000 people sleeping out in central London and up to 2,000 in other cities. In London, Crisis accommodated between 500 and 600 rough, sleepers at Open Christmas each night during Christmas week. I can announce to the House today that my Department will be funding Centrepoint Soho to open up Soho Square hospital for the whole of the month of February. The purpose is to provide shelter for those sleeping rough, who would otherwise be on the streets until the hostels being provided under my rough sleeping initiative begin to come through in March. Centrepoint will open the Soho Square hospital on 1 February.

Mr. Battle: The Minister may know of the Nightstop project, a pioneering project among homeless youngsters in Leeds, which is supported by Barnardos and the churches. Is he aware that in the three months before Christmas, it reported a doubling in the number of inquiries and contacts by homeless youngsters? While I welcome the increased resources for London, will the Minister ensure that resources extend beyond London to the other cities in Britain that are experiencing this problem? Unless social security policy for young people is tackled, it will effectively undermine the Department's initiatives.

Sir George Young: Of course my Department must help organisations that operate outside London. We have increased the funding nationally for voluntary organisations working with the homeless from £2 million this year to £4·5 million in 1991-92.

At a helpful meeting that I had with voluntary organisations earlier this month, they told me that income support was relevant to the issues that we are discussing and I have undertaken to pass on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security any suggestions that they make about changes to the income support system.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. I support the Government's attempts to increase hostel provision, but does my hon. Friend agree that it would be sensible to try to persuade those with spare rooms in their homes to let them to lodgers? It used to be traditional for young people arriving in cities to find digs with a friendly landlady who would take them in and make them one of the family. At present, however, people are being put off by the fear that the council will increase the rates, judging the accommodation to be a boarding house; that the tax man will be after them for a return on the rent; and, worst of all, that the rent officer will come round and start imposing conditions.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend made her suggestion about the friendly landlady at our last Question Time. I can think of no friendlier landlady than my hon. Friend

herself and I am sure that she will wish to act on her own proposal. Her suggestion about tax changes is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I shall pass it on to him. She is, however, right in saying that, if we are to make progress in tackling the problems of homelessness, we must use all the resources available to us, including those of the landladies whom she has mentioned.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I look forward to seeing the "To Let" signs going up in Lord North street very soon.

I thank the Minister for his visit to Crisis, which was in Bermondsey this Christmas, and for the initiatives that he has taken before and since, including today's announcement. Can he give a realistic estimate of the date by which, according to Government policy, no one who wishes to have a home will be homeless? Does he realise that a precondition of that is people having the money to pay for housing, which is currently prohibited by the social security system?

Sir George Young: We must draw a distinction between those who are homeless, as currently defined by the legislation, and those who are sleeping rough. The object of the initiative that I announced before Christmas is to make it unnecessary for young people or, indeed, anyone else to continue to sleep rough in central London. I believe that enough accommodation is in the pipeline, and coming through it, to fulfil that aim. We have announced 1,000 places in the first round of the initiative, with more coming up.

We are doing an audit with the voluntary organisations to find out exactly how many people are sleeping rough and to obtain a clearer idea of the sort of accommodation needed by those people—some of whom are highly dependent, others less so. We shall then match the results of the audit with the programme that we have on stream. I hope that we shall make progress and ensure that we have the right type and number of places for those who are currently sleeping rough.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend's announcement is very welcome. Does he agree, however, that every time that this issue comes up, year after year, it is pointed out that if Labour authorities in London released their empty houses and flats, the problem of homelessness in the capital would be solved? Has he any evidence that authorities are doing anything about the asset that they have in hand?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend reminds us of the recommendations of the Audit Commission. The commission demonstrated that if the worst performed no better than the average, a substantial number of new units would become available, leaving only about 2,500 families still in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We must, of course, do all that we can to maintain the pressure on the less good performers to achieve the higher standards that we know are possible, and my Department monitors performances regularly.

Mr. George Howarth: I welcome that latest announcement, but is not it about time that the Minister realised that the real problem is the lack of affordable housing? Schemes and announcements by the Department will not resolve that. In December, the permanent under-secretary to the Department of the Environment told the Public Accounts Committee that it costs about £9,400 a year to keep a family in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, but £200 to service debt on a council house. The Government's policy is more expensive as well as being catastrophic for people on the street and families in bed and breakfast. Is not it time that something was done instead of talk and no action.

Sir George Young: I have tried to explain to the House that we have been doing quite a lot. I know that the hon. Gentleman's concern is genuine, but there are about 600,000 empty properties in the private rented sector. If one wants to help the homeless quickly, it is more productive to examine how such properties can be brought back into use, rather than to address the longer-term questions that the hon. Gentleman raised about supply. It would take some time to increase the supply, so I want to get more properties into use quickly and cheaply. There are ways of achieving that other than the more long-term solution that he outlined.

Energy Efficiency

5. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review his regulations for home improvement grants and building regulations to take account of advances in energy efficiency measures.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The regulations for house renovation grants and building regulations are kept under review by my Department.

Mr. Colvin: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on what has been done in this sphere, but will he acknowledge that half the energy used in the United Kingdom is used in buildings and that improving energy efficiency in them would therefore have a dramatic effect in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, which is one of his Department's objectives? Will he publicise successful energy efficiency schemes to encourage developers to invest more in energy efficiency, which is financially and environmentally advantageous?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is right: we need to promote best practice in energy efficiency, as we do through the Energy Efficiency Office. I am glad to say that local authority associations recently published an environmental practice guide for local government, in which they set out many good examples of best practice for energy efficiency in local housing stock. We shall shortly organise a series of regional seminars targeted on chief executives and senior councillors to ensure that they appreciate what they can do to promote and encourage energy efficiency in their housing stock.

Mr. Squire: Is my hon. Friend aware of an excellent measure that is currently before the House, the Building Conversion and Energy Conservation Bill, which stands in my name and has the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House and people from outside the House? It would ensure proper thermal insulation of all conversions, which is not the current practice. Will my hon. Friend seriously consider that as a practical way of improving energy efficiency?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend knows that we always give serious consideration to any idea that he puts forward.

Sewage Discharge

6. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to tighten regulations on the discharging of sewage around the coasts.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): On 5 March 1990, the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), announced that in future all significant discharges of sewage to coastal waters would receive at least primary treatment. This policy is being implemented, starting with necessary revisions to those schemes in the bathing waters programme as announced by my right hon. Friend on 14 November 1990. Regulations to give statutory effect to the EC bathing waters directive are to be made shortly.

Mr. Taylor: When does the Minister expect primary screening to be implemented around our coast? Is he aware that South West Water reneged on a pre-privatisation promise to carry out screening at Kieve Mills, which causes considerable pollution along the north coast of Cornwall? Will he join me in condemning that? Have any of the other privatised water companies taken similar action?

Mr. Trippier: On the latter point, I can confirm that the requirements set out in the bathing waters directive on whether primary, secondary or tertiary treatment must be given to sewage is the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority. That will be made even clearer when the municipal waste water directive comes on stream.

Secondly, I am not in a position to accuse South West Water of doing anything of the kind. If the Government had not privatised the water industry in the way that we did, which has allowed the investment of £28 billion to improve water—that is money that I can assure the hon. Gentleman I could not possibly have got from the Treasury—we would not have been able to comply with the European directive in the first place. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we intend to have 100 per cent. compliance with the bathing waters directive by 1997. We will be the first nation in Europe to comply with that European directive at that time. That is good news for this nation, although I do not expect to see it announced in any Liberal party literature.

Mr. Kilfedder: Is the Minister aware that there is a real problem as a result of raw sewage being dumped in Belfast Lough which, as a result of wind and tide, then comes up onto the coastline of my North Down constituency? In view of that real hazard to health, will he ensure that all dumping of sewage stops as soon as possible?

Mr. Trippier: The most important point that I can make to the hon. Gentleman is that the compliance to which I referred earlier applies to the United Kingdom as a whole, so all parts of the United Kingdom have to comply with the directive. It is clear from the response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the promise of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that we will achieve that objective. I believe that we might possibly achieve that objective by 1995. I certainly hope so.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister agree that after 12 years of oil-rich Tory rule, it is a scandal that Lancaster university can report this week that children entering the sea at Blackpool are five time more likely to contract diarrhoea and three times more likely to suffer from vomiting than children who stay on the beach? Why should children bathing at Blackpool have to suffer those health hazards for at least four more years? Does not that report highlight the disgrace of the Minister's visit to Brussels just before Christmas when he tried to get the case against Blackpool dropped or suspended in the European Court of Justice? Will not the report make the Commissioner change his mind?

Mr. Trippier: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if the previous Labour Government had not cut the amount of money available to the water authorities, we would have been in a much stronger position to comply with the European bathing directive a darn sight sooner. What I consider to be a scandal is the fact that the report, which I understand is still unfinished, was leaked for purely political purposes by the Labour leader of the county council who seems to take enormous delight in dragging down and selling short Blackpool and any part of the Fylde coast. It is a national scandal and a disgrace that she has approached European Commissioner Ripa di Meana asking him not to desist in bringing a prosecution against the British Government. I have never heard of a more scandalous and unpatriotic act.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Why does Britain test for only two types of sewage bacteria when the European directive allows for 21 tests? If British beaches fail to meet even those basic minimal standards, how can Britain claim not to be the dirty man of Europe?

Mr. Trippier: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Britain is certainly not the dirty man of Europe as is clear from all the evidence. We are anxious to comply with the European directives in any particular with regard to bathing waters or water quality of any kind.

Mr. Brazier: Will my hon. Friend join me in praising the work of the National Rivers Authority, which has a major office and laboratory in my constituency? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is only since the Government introduced the National Rivers Authority that we have been able to cut the flow of pollutants to the coastline via our rivers and that that is because water authorities no longer police themselves?

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to agree with every single word. I am very happy to compliment the National Rivers Authority. It was entirely the idea of the Conservative Government that we should set up such a regulatory body. The previous Labour Government never even dreamt of setting one up. I am proud to say that it is now the toughest regulatory body in Europe.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's reply, I give notice that I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Environment Council

7. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what matters will be discussed at the next meeting of the EC Environment Council.

Mr. Trippier: The agenda for the next Environment Council in March will be a matter for the presidency,

currently held by Luxembourg. The agenda has yet to be fixed, but we expect the discussions to include proposals on sewage treatment, diesel engine emissions, dangerous chemicals, the movement of hazardous waste and a labelling scheme for environmentally friendly products.

Ms. Quin: Will Ministers be setting a date for the introduction of an environmental labelling scheme to help consumers? Does the Minister recall the commitment made in the House in March last year by the previous Secretary of State that, if agreement had not been reached at the end of 1990, the Government would go ahead with a national scheme? As no date has been set by the European Community, when will the Government bring in the national scheme that they promised?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady will have heard me mention in my substantive answer that this matter will be on the agenda of the next Council meeting. I welcome that, as I am sure she will. It is true that my right hon. Friend asssured the House that, in the event of a European scheme's not being brought forward by the end of this year——

Mr. Cryer: Last year.

Mr. Trippier: —this year—we certainly intend to introduce a national scheme. I stand by what my right hon. Friend said.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will my hon. Friend ensure that, during the discussion on sewage treatment, attention is paid to the discriminatory nature of the Commission in its legal actions against member states? For example, why has no action been taken against the Italian Government, despite the fact that all sewage from the city of Milan goes straight into the Po and out to sea, or has it something to do with the fact that the Commissioner is an Italian?

Mr. Trippier: I am more than a little concerned about this matter. There seems to be a lack of fairness in comparisons between member states. There certainly seems to be a very different way of collecting the statistics that are supposed to be made available to the Commission and an incredible delay in sending those statistics from certain member states. My hon. Friend would not expect me to name a particular country, but I listened carefully to what he said.

Much of the problem would be cleared up if we could set up the European Environment Agency. At the previous Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels I made it clear that the sooner we have that environmental agency the better, so that we can have a common statistics-gathering service. That would enable us to make fair comparisons so that prosecutions emanating from Brussels could be a little fairer. I strongly object to the fact that the Commission is sending letters to member states, possibly threatening prosecution, when the building from which they come is built on an open sewer, which would never be allowed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Minister ask the Secretary of State to take the opportunity when the Council next meets to draw attention to the serious problem in Northern Ireland of harmful emissions from power stations and the urgent necessity to have access to natural gas to reduce such harmful emissions?

Mr. Trippier: I am pleased to give that assurance.

Peak Park Planning Board

8. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce direct elections to the Peak park planning board.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so. However, the Countryside Commission is at present considering a wide-ranging review of national park policy and we shall consider its recommendations when they have been received.

Mr. Knox: How does my hon. Friend justify the fact that the Peak park is one of only two areas in the country where planning decisions are taken by people who are not directly elected? Does he think that this is fair to people who live in the Peak park, as some of my constituents do?

Mr. Baldry: As my hon. Friend will know, in the 40th anniversary year of the legislation that created the national parks, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who was then Secretary of State for the Environment, announced a wide-ranging review to consider the future policy and purposes of national parks. Clearly the matters referred to by my hon. Friend are within the terms of reference of that review, the report of which will appear shortly.

Land Register

9. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that all vacant, dormant, derelict, underused and underutilised land in public ownership is entered on the land register; how many acres are currently on the register; and how much has been sold for private development since 1 January 1990.

Sir George Young: Complete up-to-date information is not available. I am considering what further action should be taken on vacant land, including ways of improving the registers.

Mr. Summerson: Does my hon. Friend agree that were more, if not all, publicly owned land made available for development, it would not only enhance our inner-city areas and facilitate the provision of more much-needed housing, but reduce the pressures for development in the countryside?

Sir George Young: What my hon. Friend says is true. At the last reckoning, there were about 82,400 acres of derelict land on the register. Of course, a great deal of land was not registered. Much of that land is suitable for housing. If it were made available, homes could be provided for people who need them and the demand for green-field development could be reduced. I entirely endorse the principles that my hon. Friend has enunicated.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Could the register be extended to include vacant property? How many vacant houses owned by Government Departments, as distinct from local authorities, are there in the United Kingdom?

Sir George Young: I do not have the exact figures at my fingertips. From time to time efforts are made to introduce legislation that would do what the hon. Member suggests. I hope that he will accept that there is a distinction between

a register of derelict land and a register of properties that are not occupied. There would be considerable problems keeping the latter up to date.

Mr. Steen: Was not the whole point of setting up the register to identify vacant land in public ownership and then get rid of it? For the past 10 years—since the register came into existence—tens of thousands of acres of vacant public land have been got rid of, but tens of thousands of acres have also been added. Included in the latter is the land that public undertakers took with them when they went into the private sector. If the Government are having difficulty getting rid of surplus public land in local authority ownership, should not they set an example by getting rid of some of the surplus land in Government ownership, over which they have control?

Sir George Young: Of course, the Government should lead by example. As my hon. Friend knows, we issued a consultation paper on this subject last autumn and at the moment I am considering the responses. I had a most helpful meeting with my hon. Friend and his co-authors of the publication "PLUMS", which contained a foreword from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am considering how to respond, taking account of the suggestions in that consultation document and of other suggestions. It is clear that fresh initiatives in this area are needed.

Mr. O'Brien: When the Minister introduces the register of vacant dormant and derelict land will he include a separate paragraph on the vacant land under the control of the urban development corporations, particularly the London Docklands development corporation, which is being wound up? Will he state the amount of land that is in the charge of the UDCs and the LDDC?

Sir George Young: I am sure that that information is readily available from the LDDC. The LDDC took over a chunk of London that was derelict and during the past few years it has been converting that land very imaginatively and putting it to productive use. It will continue to do so until all the vacant land is put to better use.

Rural Housing

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Association of District Councils and interested local authorities about the shortage of low-cost housing in rural areas; and what action he intends to take to alleviate this situation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): My right hon. Friend receives such representations from time to time. We recognise that there is a shortage of low-cost housing in some rural areas and have taken a series of measures to help to improve supply. We have substantially increased public funding for housing association schemes through the Housing Corporation's special rural programme and we recently announced an extra £50 million of credit approvals for rural local authorities for a new programme of low-cost housing. We have also amended planning guidance to permit development of low-cost housing for local needs on small sites not otherwise designated for housing.

Mr. Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that Macclesfield borough council is extremely prudent and responsibly run and has an excellent housing officer, but that there remains a grave shortage of low-cost housing in rural areas? Does he accept that our housing investment programme allocation is effectively wiped out by the capital receipts which are taken into account and that the usable portion of capital receipts will merely cover the repair and refurbishment of existing housing stocks? My Conservative-controlled council is unanimous in its view that we must be allowed to spend more of our capital receipts on providing something that is essential for the health of our area.

Mr. Yeo: I gladly join my hon. Friend in congratulating his borough council on the efficiency with which it manages its housing. The Government's policy on capital receipts is to redirect the major portion of them to areas where the housing need is greatest, which is not always the same as the area where the receipts arise. However, I share my hon. Friend's desire that rural areas should enjoy an adequate supply of low-cost housing. I commend to him and his borough council the opportunity that now exists for local planning authorities to release small sites in villages, which would not otherwise be designated for housing, for low-cost schemes for rent and for sale to meet local needs.

Mr. Morley: Low-cost homes are welcome in rural areas, but they do not deal with the real problem of the hidden homeless—people who are living with friends and relatives—or families who move to rural areas but cannot find accommodation. Many such people had their homes repossessed because they could not keep up with crippling mortgage repayments. They need low-cost rented accommodation and councils are in the best position to provide it. Will the Minister take off the artificial restrictions on local councils and allow them to use their capital receipts to provide a choice of homes to rent and to buy?

Mr. Yeo: We have a comprehensive programme. I have already referred to the credit approvals that have been given to local authorities for use in rural areas. But the Housing Corporation programme, which will double its spending over the next three years, will go a long way to providing homes to meet the needs of the people whom the hon. Gentleman describes as the hidden homeless.

Less than one mortgage in 300 leads to a repossession, so it is hardly likely that repossessions are a major contributor to homelessness. Above all, I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises the distinction between the people whom he describes as the hidden homeless and the people whom the public may think of as homeless—the rough sleepers to whom my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning referred.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that in areas such as south Derbyshire a great deal of land can be released for rural housing through opencast coal mining? Will he welcome, as I do, the efforts of the British Coal opencast executive to develop over 400 acres of land in the Cadley hill area? It hopes to provide housing, industrial sites, a golf course, an hotel and a bypass for the local village, all of which will be welcome. Will he ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to come and see the site when it is finished?

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind invitation. There is a great deal of scope for using land —especially land that has been reclaimed, perhaps with the help of derelict land grant—for imaginative housing schemes in areas where it is easy to obtain planning permission and where the scheme will be welcome to the local community.

Local Government Finance

11. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making with his review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has announced the new community charge reduction scheme, which is the first result of our review and which will be in place to reduce next year's charges. Work on the longer term is continuing.

Mr. Nellist: Despite the answers given yesterday by the Secretary of State to me and by the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) that local authorities could be flexible about the poll tax and the troops in the Gulf, does the Minister agree that the 32 Tory councillors on Newbury district council must have approved sending a poll tax demand to 20-year-old Private Mark Patchett, who received it in a trench on the Saudi-Kuwait border? Even though I have not altered my opposition to both the tax and the war, does not the Minister accept that he should take the opportunity this afternoon to do as President Bush did in America last week, when he announced that United States rank-and-file service men and women were exempt from federal income tax, and announce that British troops in the Gulf are henceforth exempt from the poll tax?

Mr. Portillo: I listened to the exchange yesterday between the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and my right hon. Friend and I did not think that the hon. Gentleman heard my right hon. Friend correctly. What my right hon. Friend said was that community charges registration officers have discretion and that we have recommended to them that where a service man is posted to the Gulf for an indefinite period, he should be regarded as exempt from the day of his posting. The local authority that the hon. Gentleman cited recognised that it had not operated in accordance with that guidance and it issued an apology.

I have no reason to believe that the guidance is defective or that there is need for legislation. If we found that the arrangements were not working satisfactorily for any reason, we would reconsider the matter. The important thing is to give our guidance a chance to work. I have no reason to believe that it is not working satisfactorily.

Mr. Channon: Since my hon. Friend announced recently that the review would take into account not only the community charge but the functions and status of local government, will he assure me that he is giving careful attention to the need to reintroduce county boroughs which would be popular in all parts of the country?

Mr. Portillo: I have noted that my right hon. Friend and others support that idea. Many of my hon. Friends would like to have more unitary authorities and they look back to the county boroughs which used to exist. Obviously, I cannot give my right hon. Friend a commitment now, but it is within the scope of the review to consider such matters.

Rev. Martin Smyth: In an earlier reply to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), it was suggested that the review was complex. Does not it add to the complexity of the review that although the Secretary of State invited parties to participate, he turned down the offer of the fourth-largest party in the House to take part, especially when that party represents constituents, particularly service men, who will be affected?

Mr. Portillo: I am happy to clarify the matter. The Government do not think that it would be productive to talk to parties from Northern Ireland about conditions in Northern Ireland, because that is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. If representatives of parties in Northern Ireland wish to discuss the effect of the community charge and its arrangements on their constituents who live in Great Britain, I should be happy to accede to that and have a meeting with them.

Mr. Burns: Can my hon. Friend confirm whether during the review he has had any discussions with the Lord President's office or with your office, Mr. Speaker, about the rules of suspension from the House, to take into account Labour Members who are illegally refusing to pay their community charge?

Mr. Portillo: I have not had such discussions, although the question arises sometimes when local authority members who are not paying their community charge have voted on questions of non-collection. I believe that grave legal issues arise. I do not know how they would be resolved in a court of law, but elected representatives should be cautious not only about the example that they set but about voting on matters in which they have an interest.

Mr. Blunkett: In my letter to the Secretary of State on the exemption from the poll tax of service personnel in the Gulf, I offered the full co-operation of the Labour party in passing any regulations necessary to ensure that such action could be carried out by local authorities throughout the country. In the light of the comments yesterday of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) about the increase of £14 per head to residents of that area because of the number of people affected by the Gulf crisis, are the Government willing to reconsider yesterday's announcement so that full reimbursement can be made to local authorities, clarity can be provided to ensure that all people have the same treatment, wherever they live, and fairness and decency can apply?

Mr. Portillo: I am grateful for the Labour party's offer to speed through any necessary legislation, but, as I said in answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), I am not satisfied that there is a need for legislation. Our recommendations will cope satisfactorily with the generality of cases. The specific case of local authorities with a large number of service men posted to the Gulf which are therefore losing community charge income will be raised at a meeting which I shall have at 4 pm with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley), who is leading a delegation. I shall listen

carefully to what he has to say and it will be of broader application to other local authorities. When I have heard the case I shall consider it carefully.

Waste Recycling

12. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken to encourage the recycling of waste.

Mr. Baldry: The White Paper on the environment, "This Common Inheritance", sets out a number of measures that we will be pursuing vigorously to ensure successful recycling. We will be pressing industry to increase both the recycling of materials and the use of recycled material; encouraging retailers to provide collection facilities for recyclable material for their customers; and persuading industry to expand its capacity to process reclaimed material.

Mr. Mans: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. Does he agree that this country still has a long way to go before we can be satisfied with the amount of material that we recycle? Will he encourage other Departments to follow the example of the Department of the Environment in making available bins for recyclable material and in using recycled paper?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Government Departments are seeking to put their houses in order. The Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade and Industry pay a reasonable premium when purchasing recycled paper and will adopt a policy of positive discrimination in favour of recycled goods wherever practicable and economic. The Department of the Environment has introduced green bins into its main buildings as part of the scheme to recycle office grade waste paper. I hope that other Departments and every office in the country will follow that lead.

Mr. Salmond: Is the Minister aware of the technology for and possibility of using sewage in gasification for power generation or other purposes? Can he point to a single piece of research issued by his Department to local authorities to make them aware of the possibilities of recycling and using sewage in that way?

Mr. Baldry: We seek to ensure that local authorities are aware of best practice in recycling, as in every other area.

Local Government Finance

13. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with west midlands councillors to discuss the community charge review.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend met members of Birmingham city council on 18 January and discussed with them a wide range of issues relevant to the review of local government structure and finance.

Mrs. Hicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has demonstrated wisely his willingness to go and listen to the voice of the west midlands and to consult widely politicians of all parties. I thank him for that. Will he go a stage further and give those councillors the reassurance that they need, which is that he will carefully assess the weaknesses and strengths of the community charge, not least the principle that each individual should make a contribution to the payment for services received? Have Labour Members, especially those who represent west midlands seats, taken advantage of that and contributed to the debate? To date, I have heard a great deal of criticism, but not much constructive help.

Mr. Key: I give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks. We shall give due consideration to all that she says. It is true that throughout the country Ministers are meeting members of local authorities of all political parties. We are meeting Liberal Democratic Members of the House and we are grateful for their contribution to the debate. It is a matter of some sorrow that the parliamentary Labour party is not interested in taking part in the discussions.

Mr. Lewis: At the meeting did west midlands councillors complain about the bureaucracy surrounding the poll tax? Is the Minister pleased that nationwide £130 million has been wasted on updating poll tax registers during the past 12 months?

Mr. Key: The Secretary of State discussed with city councillors income from the charge, the level of standard spending assessments and the fact that Birmingham has an 18 per cent. increase in its SSAs. They discussed the overall role of government in controlling spending. There was a discussion with Labour councillors and others about the question of payment of councillors, the number of councillors and the possibility of a directly elected leader and whether he should be paid. It is curious that those councillors did not raise the point to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Conway: Is my hon. Friend aware that his Department counts Shropshire as being in the west midlands? Does he therefore accept that we in Shropshire do not regard the county borough option, which is being widely canvassed, as a suitable solution to the problems of accountability? As long as we have two-tier local government, accountability will not be achieved.

Mr. Key: I note my hon. Friend's point and I am sorry if there was any misunderstanding about it.

Mr. Gould: In the light of the earlier admission from the Minister of State that the poll tax review might leave the poll tax in place in the west midlands and elsewhere, can the Minister say what has happened to the Secretary of State's reforming zeal and to the ferocious attacks that he made on the poll tax when he was campaigning for the Tory leadership? Why will not the right hon. Gentleman and his ministerial colleagues admit that the poll tax is totally discredited and must be abolished? Why cannot he see that that simple admission will clear the way for a proper discussion of what might take its place?

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend made an exceptionally robust contribution in the House yesterday afternoon and he listened for some hours to the speeches of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would recognise the widely accepted points in favour of the community charge, such as that everybody should contribute something, which would remain valid whatever one called it.

Housing Association Rents

15. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the average increase in housing association rents in the London and south-east region during 1990-91.

Sir George Young: Information on rents is not available in this form. Most housing association tenants pay fair rents, which are subject to re-registration every two years. Increases for housing association tenancies re-registered in London and the rest of the south-east during the second quarter of 1990 were 21 and 23 per cent. respectively, over two years.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister agree that those rent increases are absolutely disgraceful for the many poor families who live in that accommodation? The Government's inability to provide sufficient funds to the Housing Corporation to support housing associations' new-build programmes has forced them to borrow money from the private sector, through the banking system. Therefore, they have to pay enormous interest rates. That is one factor which has forced up housing association rents, together with the Government's general trend towards deregulation.

Does the Minister accept that the problem of homelessness can be resolved only when we have sufficient affordable housing for rent? Only that will end the scandal of homelessness in London and the south-east.

Sir George Young: I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his question. The increase in rents was about the same as the increase in average earnings—average earnings went up 22 per cent. over two years as against rent increases of 21 and 23 per cent. For those not earning, housing benefit will bear the brunt of the increase. Such people are shielded against the increases about which we are speaking.

In the new regime under which housing associations operate they are registered charities and they are required to set rents within reach of people in low-paid employment. Although the new rents may be higher than fair rents, they enable the housing association movement to sustain a much bigger programme of new homes, for which the hon. Gentleman was calling at the end of his question.

Mr. Soley: Tenants of housing associations, councils and the private sector face a disgraceful position. Did not rents in the housing association sector go up by about 25 per cent. the other year? Is not it also true that council rents will go up dramatically in the next couple of weeks and that private sector rents are out of the reach of many people? In those three examples housing benefit does not meet the needs of many people, particularly pensioners with small occupational pensions. What will the Government do about rents that are increasingly unaffordable in a rented sector has suffered a collapse, with the loss of 1·5 million properties in the past 10 years? There must be an answer that produces affordable rents in affordable properties.

Sir George Young: I do not accept the premise on which the hon. Gentleman based his question. Housing benefit will underpin market rents—we have made that absolutely clear. If people cannot afford to pay that market rent, housing benefit will take the strain. It is not true that fair rents have increased faster than earnings—they have increased broadly in line. Over two years there has been a 22 per cent. increase in fair rents and, in London, there has been a 21 per cent. increase in earnings. Therefore, it is not true that rents are rising faster than average earnings.

I repeat that the housing benefit system exists to enable people to pay their rent. There can be no question of people losing their homes because they cannot afford to pay reasonable rents.

Competitive Tendering

16. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings he estimates will be made as a result of the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Key: The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 required local authorities to expose building and highways work to competition and compulsory competitive tendering was extended to a number of other local authority services by the Local Government Act 1988. My Department has commissioned research into the effect of the 1988 Act. Information about financial effects should be available shortly.

Mr. Day: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the Labour party proposes to abolish compulsory competitive tendering for local services, despite the benefits that it has brought to local people in the form of reduced costs and better services? Does he agree that it shows that, despite the rhetoric of the Opposition, which appears to commit them to efficiency in local government, they are in fact committed to the maintenance of socialist dogma in many of Britain's town halls?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend has put his finger on an important point. One of the greatest safeguards for local consumers of services is the Audit Commission. The Minister of State drew to the attention of the House in yesterday's debate the fact that the Labour party has plans to subsume the Audit Commission—another telling example of its intentions.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It concerns hon. Members' access to Downing street. Twenty of my hon. Friends and I had arranged to present a letter voicing our concern and that of other hon. Members about the 20 million people threatened with starvation in Africa and the Government's wholly inadequate response to that. We had arranged to be there at 10.30 this morning——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Lady relate her point of order to my responsibilities? I have no jurisdiction over what goes on in Downing street.

Mrs. Clwyd: I understand, Mr. Speaker, that you have made a previous ruling on this matter. We were told by the police in Downing street that only six hon. Members would be allowed through the gates. When we asked why, we were told that that was the rule and that it had always been so. We know that that is not true.

We were treated with considerable discourtesy and abuse by the police. We asked the policeman in charge to consult his superior; he returned 10 to 15 minutes later, and all 21 of us were allowed through the gates with no inspection of our passes.

I make this point not to ask for any privilege for hon. Members but to seek to uphold the democratic rights of elected Members to have access to the Prime Minister in No. 10.

Mr. Speaker: I have no recollection of ever having made a ruling on Downing street, which is well outside the precincts of the Palace——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me finish.

All I can tell the hon. Lady is that I am sure that what she has said will have been heard by the Ministers now on the Front Bench.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order concerns access to this place, which is your responsibility as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission.

Yesterday there was a lobby of firemen worried about cuts in the fire service, and one of my constituents, Jack Womersley, had been sent a letter by me arranging to meet him in Central Lobby, as is the custom. He was not allowed access to Central Lobby; when he was allowed in, at 2.30 pm, he was ushered down into Westminster Hall and not permitted access to Central Lobby even after a meeting in the Grand Committee Room. That meant that he had to pass a green card, transferred to him by someone else, to another person to put in for me.

It is the usual custom and practice for Members who want to show that they are meeting a constituent in Central Lobby, when this place is open, to send him a letter stating that a meeting will take place, and that is what I did. But my constituent was refused admission both before 2.30 pm and after 3 pm, and he was not allowed to come and see me. This needs looking into. I know that arrangements are made when there is a lobby, but my constituent particularly requested permission to see me and was refused, and that is disgraceful.

Mr. Speaker: I shall ask for a report about the case. I understand that there were several thousand people in the Lobby yesterday. A great deal of trouble has been caused in the past by people on lobbies coming with letters from their Members of Parliament and by that means gazumping the queue. I imagine that may be the reason why this incident took place. However, I shall look into the matter.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Many hon. Members, myself included, have an office on the outskirts of the Palace, in my case in St. Stephen's Porch. Therefore, we have occasion several times during the day to come through St. Stephen's and the Central Lobby to reach the Chamber and Committee Rooms. For us, trying to get through mass lobbies is often a difficult job, but the police officers on duty are extraordinarily helpful and respectful to constituents visiting this place. Those who observe them carrying out their duties know that some of the accusations made today are far from the normal practice. We should be grateful for their vigilance.

Mr. Speaker: The House accepts that the police do a remarkable job, particularly in dealing with what I understand was a lobby of 10,000.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, although he is taking time from an Opposition supply day.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a simple point of order. I understand that the BBC, as part of a general move towards censorship, has banned any song that includes the word "peace" in the title or lyrics. Some 67 songs have been banned and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not by the wildest stretch of the imagination could I be held responsible for that. I would not relish songs in the Chamber, either.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I was in the same position yesterday during the firemen's lobby. When you review this matter, may I suggest that you think about the convenience of hon. Members? I write to constituents and arrange to meet them at a specific time in a specific place, for my convienence. Yesterday, I was seriously inconvenienced by the fact that my constituent was trying to gain entrance with my letter but was refused. Will you consider that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: I shall consider that, but I recollect that, when I was in a rather different position, with the late friend of many hon. Members, Mr. Walter Harrison, we had trouble with large lobbies.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Late? I saw him yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: I beg his pardon. I hope that Walter Harrison is very much with us.

I shall look into the matter, but it is not as easy as hon. Members sometimes make out.

BILL PRESENTED

PROTECTION OF BADGERS

Sir Nicholas Bonsor, supported by Mr. Michael Colvin, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Nicholas Soames and Mr. Barry Field, presented a Bill to amend the Badgers Act 1973 to extend protection to badger setts against acts likely to cause bodily harm to badgers, to restrict further the entry of dogs into badger setts, to increase the penalties for offences under the Act, and to amend further the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to allow courts to disqualify those convicted of certain offences under the Badgers Act 1973 from keeping a dog: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 70.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Agricultural, Fishery and Aquaculture Products (Improvement Grant) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Nurse Prescribing

3.38 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Medicines Act 1968, the National Health Service Act 1977 and the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 in respect of pharmaceutical services; to make provision for registered nurses to prescribe medicinal products in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of my Bill is straightforward. It is to give nurses the authority to write prescriptions for a limited number of medicines. Although hundreds of thousands of patients receive care at home from Britain's 28,000 community nurses, and although it is those nurses who determine what medicines or medications are needed for re-supply, only a doctor can sign the necessary prescription form. This is a bureaucratic bottleneck that needs breaking. The object of my Bill is not to involve nurses in the diagnosis of a disease or its treatment—none want that—but to allow them more responsibility in the long-term, continuing management of a patient's care.

This is a liberalising Bill. It costs nothing. It increases efficiency and diminishes suffering. Imagine someone with a disability or a chronic disease or whom age has made infirm. A routine medication that he needs, often something ordinary such as a dressing or a lotion, runs out. The community nurse who visits regularly can do nothing, so the patient has to lug himself down to the nearest surgery—often long distances in the country—or through heavy London traffic, and wait in a queue for the doctor to fill in a form. Such madness imposes suffering and strain on hundreds of thousands. It causes frustration in the nursing profession and unnecessary inefficiency in the medical one.

The Bill would do away with the need for doctors to waste their time writing out prescriptions for such things as bandages or repeat dosages of pain killers. Nurses who had had training to the highest standards would be able to write them instead, but only from an agreed list of products—a nurses formulary, as it would be called.

This decent liberalising measure is already in place in countries such as Canada and the United States, but in Britain there has been unpardonable delay. Report after report has looked into the suggestion that nurses should be given the power to prescribe, and report after report has said that we should go ahead with it because it is a good idea which will streamline procedures.

First, a committee headed by my noble friend Lady Cumberlege reported in 1986. A year later, the Select Committee on Social Services recommended that the Government get a move on. The Department of Health decided to go over the ground itself once again and its report was even more emphatic. It said, "Let nurses prescribe," and set a deadline of this year for making the legislative changes. Those changes constitute my Bill.

Section 52 of the Medicines Act 1968 needs amendment so that pharmacists can recognise prescriptions written by nurses. Likewise, section 27 of the National Health Service Act 1977 needs amendment so that prescriptions written by nurses can be dispensed.

The whole thrust of health care, not just in Britain but throughout the west, is to allow those who are elderly, disabled or chronically ill to get as much treatment at home as possible. It is cheaper and it is better that way. A

[Mr. Dudley Fishburn]

successful system of health care is one that keeps as many people as possible away from the queue at the doctor's surgery or the hospital clinic.

That is why the British Medical Association wants to see the legislation passed. It knows that nurses already write out prescriptions unofficially for the overworked doctor to scrawl his incomprehensible signature on. But it knows, too, that that is not good practice.

Britain's nurses want the change and the responsibility and training that would go with it because they want the best, fastest, most uncluttered service for their patients. They can see the absurdity of cancer patients suffering great pain at home who cannot have the dosage of their painkiller altered by the nurse who looks after them. They know the inconvenience facing an incontinent elderly person who cannot even get something as simple as a bedpad without a visit to the doctor.

But most of all, it is the public who need the change. The extension of limited prescribing rights to nurses is supported by groups such as Age Concern and the Spastics Society, by those trying to help the homeless, who generally do not have resort to a general practitioner, and by those helping the terminally ill to live out their last days without disruption.

But the net goes far further than that. Just to give one example, thousands of diabetics who regularly have to inject themselves with insulin would be able to get their supplies of syringes from their community nurses.

The Bill appeals to me as a Conservative, as I know it appeals to those on the Opposition side who have supported me, because it liberalises, because it strips back a layer of form filling, because it costs nothing. It reflects the times by allowing the best modern practice and it reflects a need—the need to deliver our health services with the maximum of efficiency and a minimum of fuss. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. Jack Ashley, Sir David Price, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. Sam Galbraith, Mr. John Butterfill, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Ms. Hilary Armstrong and Mr. Roger Sims.

Nurse Prescribing

Mr. Dudley Fishburn accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Medicines Act 1968, the National Health Service Act 1977 and the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 in respect of pharmaceutical services; to make provision for registered nurses to prescribe medicinal products in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 April and to be printed. [Bill 71.]

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Recession in Industry

3.45 pm

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned about the deepening recession which is bringing rising bankruptcies and closures, falling output and investment and fast rising unemployment hitting all regions and all industries; notes that Britain has the biggest trade gap, the highest interest rates and worst inflation of its major European competitors; condemns the Government for the economic mismanagement that has created a recession that is happening nowhere else in Western Europe; and calls for an immediate reduction in interest rates, a Budget for investment in industry, and a modern industrial policy to improve Britain's training and technological capabilities and to promote regional economic development.

The motion states that urgent measures are needed to tackle the recession, British industry needs a long-term policy, as an immediate measure interest rates should be cut, we need the Chancellor to plan a Budget giving investment incentives for the future, and the new industry policy for the 1990s—similar to that practised by our successful competitors overseas—must ensure a proper commitment to training, technology and regional economic development.

The motion is urgent because, as right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House know, 100 companies throughout Britain will go bankrupt today alone. This week, at least 5,000 men and women will lose their jobs in manufacturing industry alone. Yesterday's Confederation of British Industry survey reported that only 4 per cent. of British firms are in any way optimistic about the future. No other western European country is losing so many jobs, and so many companies, at such a fast rate as the United Kingdom. The tragedy is that that is occurring in every area, region, occupation and profession. It is also tragic that the Government's response to our motion does not make one mention of their concern about the loss of businesses, closures and bankruptcies, and the rising unemployment that confronts all parts of the country.

Eleven and a half years ago, the Government set out to eliminate assistance to industry. They not only eliminated assistance but much of industry as well. First, we were told by Ministers that there was to be no recession. As the Prime Minister said to us on 6 December 1989 in his previous office as Chancellor of the Exchequer:

"I do not think that a recession is either likely or necessary."

He remarked that those who predicted recession were "professional pessimists".

Next, we were told that there would be no recession, but that there would be a pause—a turn of phrase which is in the style of the earlier prediction about an inflationary blip. As recently as 30 October 1990, we were told that if there were to be a recession, it would be short; then that it would be small; then that it would be shallow; then that it would be modest. When it was proved that the recession would not be short, small, shallow or modest, the present

Chancellor agreed in a radio interview on 1 January that there was a recession, but that there would be a prize at the end of it.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not to be outdone in that battle of euphemisms, made one visit to a House of Lords Select Committee just before Christmas, and told it:

"When I go north to Scotland, if you mention the word recession, then they think you are referring to some dim and distant time in 1981, and you have to explain that you are referring to the south-east of England."

Note that the Secretary of State responsible for managing this country's industrial policy thinks that recession is taking place only in the south-east. He told the Committee also that that meant there was "some silver lining".

Are the closure of Alvis Stewdens, the rundown of Andersons, the rundown of Plessey, the rundown of Clydesdale, and the rundown of Cummins in Scotland—all those firms have announced redundancies within the past few days with a total loss in one day yesterday of 1,000 jobs—all part of the same "silver lining"?

Will the Minister stand outside the jobcentre today in my constituency or those of my hon. Friends—indeed, those in many Conservative Members' constituencies—and tell hundreds of workers who are having to sign on for the first time that there is no recession in Scotland and the north-east?

Will the Secretary of State come to my constituency or to others to say that our recessionary problems refer to "some dim and distant time in 1981"?

Is he really saying that people are being made redundant throughout the country—in the north, north-west, Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland—because we are still enjoying that economic miracle?

Ministers told us that there was an economic miracle when there was not. Now they insist on telling us that there is no recession in much of the country, when we know there is. How can we trust them with the future, when they deny the problems of the present and of the past?

I thought that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had no policies for the recession because he was ideologically inclined against any Government action at all. Now I know that he has no such policies because he does not believe that in much of the country there is a recession. The last Trade and Industry Secretary but one was praised because it was said that he did not bring problems, but solutions. This Trade and Industry Secretary cannot bring solutions, because he cannot even admit that there are problems.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman is talking about denying the policies of the past, but why is it that, in the past, when the Labour party was in power, this country's share of world trade went down year after year, whereas now, with the present Government in power, we have maintained our share of world trade?

Mr. Brown: I think that the hon. Gentleman must have the wrong briefing note from Conservative central office. Whatever the hon. Gentleman says, the fact of the matter is that, under Labour, our share of manufacturing in world trade went up and under this Conservative Government that share has gone down substantially. If the Secretary of State or any other Conservative Member wants to correct me, I shall be happy to give way at this point.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): If the hon. Gentleman is saying that that is the case, will he quote the figures to the House?

Mr. Brown: In 1979, our share of manufacturing world trade was roughly 10 per cent., and now it is about 8 per cent. I shall give the hon. Gentleman the figures during the debate if he asks me again.

Let me tell the Secretary of State about the severity of the recession that he has for so long attempted to deny. When factories up and down the country are already producing less than in 1979—5 per cent. less in chemical engineering, 9 per cent. less in metal products, 26 per cent. less in textiles, 33 per cent. less in man-made fibres; when manufacturing investment has barely increased overall since 1979; when we have lost 2 million jobs in manufacturing, and manufacturing employment is set to fall below 5 million for the first time this century; when, for thousands of factories and companies this is not a downturn on the road to an upturn but a downturn on the road to closure for ever; and when the interest rate bill, as Conservative Members know from their own constituents, was £6 billion in 1979 and is now an astonishing £30 billion for small and large industry throughout the country, this is not, as the Confederation of British Industry confirmed yesterday, merely a recession which is deepening faster than ever, but a recession which is unique to Britain and is happening nowhere else in western Europe.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that manufacturing output since 1979 is about 12 per cent. higher than it was, whereas under the previous Labour Government manufacturing output fell by 2·5 per cent?

Mr. Brown: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman the correct figure. Manufacturing output, according to the latest account, is up by only 7 per cent. since 1979. In that time it has risen by 18 per cent. in Germany and by nearly 50 per cent. in Japan. That is the real position—we have had the slowest rise in manufacturing output of almost all our major competitors.

This is not a recession for which world conditions, OPEC, the Gulf crisis or the European Community can be blamed. This recession has been designed, fashioned and made in Downing street. We are not in the sixth month of a Europewide recession. Investment is not falling in the European Community; output has not slumped by £5 billion in six months in any other major European country. No other country in western Europe has experienced the same combination of falling orders, falling employment, falling investment and now falling exports.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does the hon. Gentleman now regret his commitment to the pound's entry into the exchange rate mechanism, which has resulted in interest rates remaining high?

Mr. Brown: Not at all. I think that many Conservative Members were unhappy about the party-political advantage that the Chancellor tried to extract from entry at the time; but what Labour said before, during and after the event was that ERM entry must be accompanied by a proper policy for industry, so that we can make the commitment to training, technology and regional economic development that has been made by all our competitors that are also in the ERM.

Mr. Budgen: What about the question?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman may think that he asked me a different question, but I replied to the question that he asked me.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): May I remind the hon. Gentleman of what my hon. Friend said? The Opposition motion refers to the need for an
"immediate reduction in interest rates".
I assume that the hon. Gentleman believes in that; but, given his and my support for the exchange rate mechanism, how will that be possible unless—as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) pointed out—the pound is allowed to fall outside the ERM brackets?

Mr. Brown: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is advancing the proposition that interest rates can never be reduced within the exchange rate mechanism, but let me tell him that the question whether they should fall now is a matter of judgment; and I prefer the judgment of my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to that of the Conservative Ministers who have failed the country over the past few years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have one hon. Member on his feet at a time.

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Lilley): The hon. Gentleman said that he preferred the judgment of his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Can he name any occasion on which his right hon. and learned Friend has not believed that interest rates should be cut?

Mr. Brown: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what happened in 1988, if that is what he is referring to. In 1988, we advocated a cut in interest rates, but what we did not advocate was a Budget that put money into the economy in a way that was geared disproportionately towards the higher income earners.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I must make some progress. I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman later.

All over Europe, employment in the manufacturing industries is rising. It is rising by nearly 1 per cent. in France, and by 3·5 per cent. in Germany; it is falling, uniquely, in Britain by 1·4 per cent. This from the party that told us that it had brought an employment miracle. Unemployment is now rising faster here than in any of our major European competitors.

In western Europe, manufacturing output is moving ahead. It is moving ahead by 4 per cent. in Germany, by 3 per cent. in France and by 3 per cent. in Europe as a whole; but it is falling, uniquely, in Britain. It is rising in almost every country except Conservative Britain. This from the party that promised not an economic recession, but an economic miracle.

Let us look at investment for the future. In Europe, business investment is rising by 4·9 per cent. in both Germany and France, by 4 per cent. in Italy and by 3 per cent. in Europe as a whole, and by 6 per cent. in Japan. It is falling, uniquely, in Britain—by 3 per cent. according to the latest OECD estimate. This from the party that said that it was presiding over an investment miracle, rather than the investment collapse that we are now experiencing.

We are the only European country where investment is falling in the run-up to 1992—the only country which faces the harsher conditions of the single European market with less investment this year than last, and less investment last year than the year before. This is not a Europewide recession but a British recession, made in Britain by the mistakes of Conservative Ministers.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman seems to take great delight from talking down this country. If our record is so disastrous, as he likes to suggest, why have 700 foreign companies decided to invest in the west midlands, the heart of the United Kingdom? Why did not they go elsewhere?

Mr. Brown: Of course we welcome foreign investment in Britain. It is unfortunate that the Department of Trade and Industry is selling Britain abroad as a low-wage country. We welcome foreign investment in Britain, but what worries me is that jobs are being lost not only in foreign companies but in domestic companies right, left and centre up and down the country. If we are to keep jobs in foreign and domestic firms, we shall have to tackle the problems that they face. That is precisely what we propose to do.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I have given way many times.

What do the Government propose to do? When the Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he gave an interview to the *Financial Times* on how the problem could be solved, what way out he saw and how difficult it would be to change things. His perhaps inadvertent use of a marine metaphor was revealing. He said that sorting out the problem was
"like turning the Titanic round, as you know."
He will agree that the choice of the Titanic was an unfortunate simile in more ways than one. As every schoolboy knows, the Titanic was not for turning. It hit an iceberg at 20 knots and sank. By the time they tried to turn it, it was too late.

This recession, as the Prime Minister surely knows, did not happen by accident. Its origins are neither remote nor mysterious. To understand it and how it began, we must ask who were the most influential economic Ministers when, in 1987 and 1988, the policies about which we warned were being developed and implemented. There is much talk of the part played by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), who is now the scapegoat in the wilderness and is punished for his sins with his three directorships, one non-executive chairmanship and a reputed income of £5,000 a day from his part-time employment.

Are we seriously being asked to believe that even he could undermine a whole economy single handed? Even the most cursory investigation of the events leading up to the remarkable Budget of 1988, the consequences of which still haunt us, reveal the identity of the principal collaborators. Where were the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at the time of the events that led up to the recession? Can they account for their movements in the second week of January 1988? Were not they at that

great Budget weekend when the 1988 Budget was being planned? Did not they support the then Chancellor, who is now the scapegoat? Were not they persuaded at the time? Did not they enthusiastically defend that Budget?

Who was Economic Secretary to the Treasury in the early spring of 1988? None other than the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Who was Financial Secretary to the Treasury? None other than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is now at No. 11 Downing street. Who was the Chief Secretary to the Treasury? None other than the Prime Minister, who is now at No. 10.

Did that gang of three have no influence? Are they entirely blameless for what went wrong? Did not they bask in the brief glory of that giddy post-Budget spring, telling us that they had created an economic miracle? Do they seriously ask us to believe that the departure of the right hon. Member for Blaby somehow exonerates them from responsibility? Let there be no doubt about it: they are, as the poll tax legislation puts it, "jointly and severally responsible" before, during and after the fact.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: [illegible]

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is not giving way.

Mr. Brown: I have given way to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) in every debate in which we have discussed this matter and I have tried to remind him of the Conservative party manifesto commitment that inflation would be reduced substantially under a Conservative Government.

The great tragedy for Britain is that the Treasury Ministers who failed in the past now comprise the Prime Minister's economic team which is supposed to lead us into the future. Those people told us that they had created an economic miracle, that Britain had achieved a dramatic economic transformation and that manufacturing industry was a Labour obsession. They told us that an industry policy was not necessary and that the trade deficit was of no consequence and had nothing to do with competitiveness.

Those were the people who, with the Prime Minister, told us that, while Britain had envied Germany during the 1960s and 1970s, the position was now entirely reversed. Do those people have any credibility now when they come to us and say that they have solutions to the problems that they have caused? They denied that there was a recession, but there is one; they said that it was not severe, but it is; and they claimed that it was happening elsewhere, but it is not. Try as they might to blame external events and to find scapegoats, they cannot blame anyone but themselves.

The failures are not just failures of economic mismanagement over the past three years. There has been a complete failure of industry policy over the past eleven and a half years. The problem is one not just of the mismanagement of demand in the short term, but of the failure to bring adequate industrial capacity over the long term.

Our complaint is that a short-term consumer boom was bound to be unsustainable and lead to higher imports, higher interest rates and pressures on inflation simply because that consumer boom was not underpinned by long-term adequate investment.

The real problem is not just that demand grew too fast because of the sins of commission such as the 1988 Budget, but that our capacity has grown too slowly because of the sins of omission—the absence of a policy for industry. How else do we explain the fact that, in Britain, industrial production has increased by only 12 per cent. and manufacturing output by only 7 per cent.? However, with demand increasing by 40 per cent. over the past eleven and a half years, imports have increased by 65 per cent. and manufacturing imports by 236 per cent.

No wonder Britain now has a manufacturing economy that has fallen behind France and Italy and is falling to the size of Brazil. No wonder Germany now exports three times as many manufactured goods as Britain. No wonder the production of electric motors, transformers, tractors, ships and lorries has halved over the past 10 years. No wonder Britain now imports 3 million computers a year and 2 billion microchips.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for officials to be briefing a Conservative Back Bencher?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is being briefed, but he is not on my list to be called.

Mr. Brown: I do not know how many Parliamentary Private Secretaries the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry possesses.

No wonder we face this position after 11 years. I was asked earlier about our share of world trade. In 1974, our share of world trade was 8·5 per cent. By 1979, our manufacturing share had risen to 9·1 per cent. and the latest figure available shows that it is back to 8·2 per cent. That is an appalling record of performance in world trade. No wonder we have a massive manufacturing deficit.

The tragedy is that, without a policy for industry, this recession, which has been caused by Ministers, is merely the interval between making mistakes in one short-term consumer boom and repeating them in another.

It is Labour's case—a case which the Government resist—that we cannot solve industry's deep-seated problems unless we have an industry policy with the Government and industry working in partnership to secure specific objectives in training, in technology and in securing balanced economic development.

The key feature of Government policy is that, even as the gap with our competitors widens, they ignore the problem, do very little, and almost always too late. In every case, the barrier to their acting is their crude free market ideology. Let use consider what needs to be done.

Sir William Clark: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I have given way on numerous occasions. We must make some progress. The right hon. Gentleman will have plenty of time to make his contribution later.

Let us consider what needs to be done when more young people leave school early; when more young people are without qualifications, when there are fewer people in the workplace with qualifications; when we have fewer college and university students than Korea and the number is falling to the level of Taiwan; when the Government's own head of training admitted that, at every

[Mr. Brown]

level, we are towards the bottom of the training league table, whether in education, youth training, higher level skills training or management training; when Lord Tombs, who advises the Prime Minister on economic matters, said that normal market forces cannot solve the problem; and when we are in the unique situation of having the fastest rising unemployment of our major competitors and yet skill shortages in our labour force, underpinned by cuts in the training budget over the next three years——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell *rose*——

Sir William Clark *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way. I have made that absolutely clear. I want to make some progress. I have given way on many occasions.

We need to implement Labour's policy—a national training strategy, clear targets set by industry working with Government and locally delivered, a guarantee of high-quality training for every young person and a working environment in which all employers are obliged to train so that the good firms are not undercut by the bad firms and the firms that train do not lose out to those who poach. What do the Government do? They insist on continuing the crude free market approach that has clearly failed, instead of pursuing the successful policy for change that exists elsewhere in our competitor countries.

It makes absolutely no sense to have a situation in our national economy in which some regions are growing at half the rate of others. It makes no sense to have congestion, pollution and pressure on the green belt in one part of the country and forced emigration from the other. Germany and Italy recognise that they need to spend more on regional policy and that the task is to modernise it, not to abandon it. It is absolutely clear that Labour's policy —the creation of regional development agencies, the targeting of regional investment incentives on training and technology, the encouragement to banks and venture capital funds to work in the regions with those development agencies to build and strengthen them—is not only successfully pursued elsewhere but is right for Britain.

When that is the case, what does the Department of Trade and Industry, which is charged with responsibility for regional policy, actually do? The Secretary of State went along to the famous House of Lords Select Committee. When he was asked whether he was doing all that he practically could in regional policy, was his answer that more resources might be provided if the cash was available and that, if the problem was greater, he would provide more? Would more resources be available if the need could be proven? No. He said that the Government were doing everything that they could—no turning back from the regional aid cuts that have characterised the Government. He will do absolutely nothing.

It is worse than that. When we had the 1988 regional review, we were promised that DTI spending on the regions would increase and that the replacement for regional development grants and regional enterprise grants would lead to the expenditure of considerable sums of money. Of the £42 million that was budgeted for the new grants, only £9 million has actually been spent after two years. That is less than £1 in every £4 promised. Yet the Secretary of State says that he is doing all that he can.

Is it not the case that the Department of Trade and Industry is now dominated by three Ministers who are all members of the No Turning Back group? I refer to the Secretary of State, the Minister of State and the Minister with responsibility for regional policy. Not for them that the Government should do what they can as a matter of practical help; for them, the Government should do as little as possible as a matter of dogma. Is it not the case that, at every point at which the Government should be enabling industry to succeed, the Department of Trade and Industry is doing absolutely nothing? We should consider the programmes.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way.

When we need incentives to invest in civil research, when we need technology transfer within our regions, when we need more small firms to be encouraged to undertake research and development, and when we need the market research schemes that the Government abandoned, what do the Government do? Over the past four years, they have abandoned almost every successful initiative, not because they have failed but because it is not in the Government's interests to prove that schemes that can help industry should work.

When we now have the recommendations from the CBI for a technology policy to help small firms; when we have the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology—the scientific advisers to the Government—that biotechnology and opto-electronics need Government support; when we have the view of the Trade and Industry Select Committee that information technology should be accorded some priority; and when the DTI's own innovation advisory board advises the Minister about the chronic short-termism of the City, is it not the case that, even during a recession, even as we face the challenges of 1992, the Secretary of State is presiding over some of the severest cuts in the industry budget to have taken place for a decade? We have had an 18 per cent. cut this year—27 per cent. cumulatively over two years, 36 per cent. over the three-year planning period.

The Government are not cutting administrative fat; indeed, they are spending millions moving into some of the most expensive office space in London. They are not cutting bureaucracy; even as responsibilities are abandoned, the amount spent on administration has risen to 23 per cent. of the budget. Given that the Secretary of State's right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health wants to intervene against the health service, whose administrative costs are 5 per cent., what does he say now that the budget costs for administration have been allowed to rise to 23 per cent?

What the Government are actually cutting is technology transfer—by 22 per cent.—expenditure on research and development and support for innovation. All these things have been considered by all-party Committees, and, in my view, the House of Lords Select Committee, with the evidence that it now has, will make certain recommendations. These cuts are being made not

because industry does not need help during a recession—it does—but because, as a matter of dogma, the Government have decided that nothing should be done.

Apparently the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), when he went through the doors of the DTI, asked what the place was for. The right hon. Member for Southend West, (Mr. Channon), one of his predecessors, said that he did not know what an industry policy was. Of course, Lord Young put his view on record as he departed. In 1988 he said that in the DTI the drive to improve industrial enterprise was over. The DTI, Lord Young said, had become a bore; there was nothing left to be done—a "do nothing" Department, as defined by Lord Young. Yet, even as we approach 1992, what we are seeing under the new Secretary of State is not a modification of the reductions in support but an intensification of them. I can think of no other country in Europe where the budgets for training and for industry are being simultaneously cut, yet it is Britain where industry, because of the recession, is doing worst of all.

What is the reality? Ministers have responsibility for the regions, but they are cutting the budgets for the regions; Ministers in the Department of Employment have responsibility for training, but they are able to cut back on support for training; Ministers have responsibility for technology, but their policy is to cut back on support for technology; Ministers accept the responsibility for industrial research and development, but their policy is to run down support for such research and development. Whereas, in other countries, industrial policy is about Governments working in partnership with industry—taking practical measures to build industrial performance—in this country industrial policy is about the Government withdrawing support for industry as a matter for ideology, no matter what the consequences for businesses up and down the country.

In eleven and a half years the Department of Industry has had nine leaders, but no leadership at all. Does anybody believe that, if the Department of Industry had not existed, the present Government would have created it? The message of the last few weeks—since the change of Prime Minister—is that one can change the leadership at the top, and one can change even the style and the rhetoric, but one cannot persuade people that one has changed unless one changes policy. Doing nothing, even with a new face at the top of the DTI, is still doing nothing; inactivity, even with expensive public relations, is still inactivity; dogma, even under new management, is still dogma.

We have had eleven and a half years, at the end of which inflation is more than 9 per cent., whereas the Government promised that it would be zero; eleven and a half years, at the end of which it seems a matter for self-congratulation to Ministers that the trade deficit is £16 billion, a figure unparalleled before the present Government came to power; eleven and a half years, at the end of which the Government have consistently failed to address the long-term problems that they claim to have solved in their first few years; eleven and a half years of squandering £100 billion of North Sea oil revenues, with no thought of tomorrow; eleven and a half years in which they have systematically denied industry the support and co-operation that our competitors give their industry. We have ended up with the worst interest rates, the highest inflation, the biggest trade gap, the slowest growth, the lowest investment and the fastest rising unemployment of our major European competitors.

The recession is the fault of the Government. The recession is unique to Britain in western Europe. It is the direct responsibility of Ministers. That is an unanswerable case. It is also an unanswerable case that Britain needs a long-term policy for industry which backs our people, our skills and our inventiveness and does so in every part of the country. That is the industry policy which the Conservative party cannot support because of dogma and therefore they will lose the election. It is the policy which Labour demands for Britain, and that is why we shall win.

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates Her Majesty's Government on policies which have transformed economic performance and, over the last decade, achieved a faster rate of output and investment growth than in Germany, France and Italy, the largest increase in manufacturing productivity of any major industrial country, record levels of exports, a record number of businesses, the highest ever number of people in work and an unemployment rate below the average of the European Community; welcomes the threefold increase in shareholders since 1979; and commends the resolve of Her Majesty's Government to bear down on inflation and to continue with the supply side policies which have contributed to these achievements.'.

As I have listened to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) at the Dispatch Box over the years, I have learnt respect for his considerable talents. Above all, I have recognised that his principal skill, which he deployed with effect today, is to depict gloom and predict doom. Unfortunately, for the bulk of the period during which he has been in Parliament, the British economy has outstripped even our strongest competitors in Europe and his skills have failed to carry conviction when he has attempted to paint a picture of gloom. Now that industry faces a severe slowdown in demand—I recognise that it does—the hon. Gentleman is in his element.

However, I do not propose to dispute in detail the picture that the hon. Gentleman painted of the current position. I want to concentrate on his attempt at a diagnosis, his attempt at a prognosis and his attempt at a prescription to cure the illness of which he complains. The hon. Gentleman scarcely spelled out a proper diagnosis of what is wrong with the British economy.

The real disease from which we suffer is inflation. Inflation is an evil not only in itself, because it penalises the weakest and poorest sections of society—the old, the sick and those on fixed incomes—but because it creates further evils by eroding competitiveness and destroying jobs, savings and the incentive to invest. In turn, inflation is the consequence of excessive demand—demand which grows faster than output. Its cure must inevitably involve a period of slower growth of demand. When monetary demand outstrips output, prices are bid up and costs are allowed to increase. When monetary demand is slowed down, prices and costs are put under intense pressure. That process is painful but essential, and it is what is happening at present.

On a previous occasion, I challenged the hon. Gentleman to say whether he believed that inflation could be curbed without a slowdown in demand. Has he yet found an answer to that question? Does Labour have a painless solution to the problem of inflation? I take it from his silence that it does not.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

Although the hon. Gentleman's diagnosis was pretty hazy, not to say non-existent, his prediction of what would happen from now on was clear, but wrong. He believes that the economy is set to spiral downwards into a prolonged slump. But we should discount his predictions, for three reasons. First, he does not realise that the very severity of the slowdown in demand means that price inflation will be curbed more sharply than would otherwise be the case.

One inflation has slowed down, the Chancellor will be able to reduce interest rates, and non-inflationary growth will resume. Indeed, the reduction of inflation itself will provide the economy with a stimulus. What is more, the reforms that we have introduced to the labour market over the years, coupled with a pegged exchange rate, will result in a more rapid response of pay costs to this slowdown than we have seen in previous cycles.

The second reason why I found the hon. Gentleman's gloomy outlook and forecast unacceptable is that his forecasts have invariably proved wrong in the past.

Mr. Gordon Brown: What about the Government's?

Mr. Lilley: He is happy to quote other peoples' forecasts, but he is a little disturbed when people quote his forecasts back to him. In 1986, he wrote in *The Guardian*:

"In 1990 around 3·12 million of us will still be unemployed . . . The Government simply cannot reduce unemployment by present economic policies."

The fact is that unemployment in this country is substantially lower than the average of our European partners; under the Labour Government, it was higher than the average of the European Community.

Earlier, in February 1974, the hon. Gentleman told the House:

"there is no evidence that economic recovery is in sight."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1984, Vol. 54, c. 316.]

We know that that was three years into the recovery from that recession.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Before my hon. Friend came to the House of Commons.

Mr. Lilley: It was in 1984; I am so sorry.

Thirdly, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does not seem to recognise that although inflation is a nasty disease, the British economy is fundamentally much healthier than when it faced recessions in the early 1970s and early 1980s. It will continue to thrive once inflation has been curbed. Let me give the House a few indicators of how dramatically the economy has improved in strength and vigour over the last decade.

The hon. Gentleman always focuses on manufacturing. Manufacturing output fell under the Labour Government; it has risen substantially under this Government. Indeed, in the 1980s as a whole, it rose by about a quarter, which was faster than the rise in Germany, France and Italy.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): What is happening now?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman wants to know, previous economic slowdowns have always been led by manufacturing, and manufacturing has suffered the greatest fall in output. They have also been led by the regions and by Scotland. The difference between this slowdown and its predecessors is that manufacturing has suffered less, the regions and Scotland have suffered less, and the concentration has been on areas of the economy which are most heavily borrowed—the housing market, the south-east and, compared with other slowdowns, the service industries.

Mr. Grocott: Can the Secretary of State tell us what the level of manufacturing output will be in six months' time, on present estimates, in comparison with what it was in 1979?

Mr. Lilley: As I have acknowledged, we are going through a severe slowdown in demand. However, the hon. Member is typical of his party in taking a short-term view. I am dealing with the performance of the economy and the improvement in its health over a decade.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Secretary of State says that the Scottish economy is doing well in the recession. He knows the great concern that there is in Scotland about the fate of the steel industry. Can he and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is sitting beside him, confirm that they have the power, if they so choose, to refer the steel industry to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? The Secretary of State need not be impeded by the view of the Director General of Fair Trading, any more than he was last month, when, against the advice of the director general, he referred the bid for AMOCO refining assets by Elf Aquitaine to the MMC.

Mr. Lilley: References can be made only on the basis of concrete complaints of specific infringements of competition rules. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman accepts that Scotland's economy is suffering relatively less than the rest of the economy, particularly compared with past slowdowns.

The other great change in manufacturing industry is that productivity, once our weakest spot, has increased enormously. It rose by 60 per cent. during the past decade, which is faster than any other major industrialised country, including Japan—a happy contrast to two decades when we were at the bottom of the league.

Let us also look at the performance of exports, which tells the same story of increasing strength over the decade. Manufacturing exports are at record levels with volume nearly 60 per cent. higher than in 1980.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend will know that, last year, the British motor industry increased its exports by 44·7 per cent. over the 1989 figure. Definite progress is being made. That is discounting the fact that the Ford motor company did not commence exporting cars until last December.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which illustrates a widespread phenomenon. Manufacturing industry is now both more competitive and more flexible. It is increasingly able to replace weak home demands by finding increased export sales abroad. The motor car industry has seen a reduction in domestic sales, but it has almost fully offset that by increasing exports by nearly a half. In December, exports were up 125 per cent. on the previous year. That reflects the return to exporting by Ford, the first exports from Ellesmere Port in 15 years and the arrival of Japanese manufacturers in this country.

Another source of strength in the past decade has been the take-off of the enterprise culture. There are now some 400,000 more firms in this country than there were in 1980.

Some are facing difficulties, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East highlighted. Despite the high interest rates of the past year, the number of new businesses created during that period has exceeded the number merging or closing down.

The biggest transformation in our economy in the past decade has been in industrial relations. During the whole post-war period, that was our greatest weakness. We were notorious for strikes, stoppages and industrial disputes. Last year saw the lowest number of industrial disputes for 50 years. That is a substantial improvement in the underlying strength of the British economy.

Perhaps the clearest indicator of the improved climate for manufacturing industry in particular, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said, is the willingness and eagerness of foreign industry to locate its plants here. It would not do so if the economic analysis of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East were correct. The fact is that United States direct investment in the United Kingdom exceeds that in West Germany, France and Holland combined. It has grown by more than 70 per cent. in the past 5 years. Japan has nearly twice as much direct investment in the United Kingdom as in any other European Community state.

The investment has come not only in the car sector, with three major Japanese car firms choosing to place their European operations in Britain, but in consumer electronics, electronic components, bearings and machine tools.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The Secretary of State must be concerned about the type of investment that takes place when money is put into companies only to buy them out. Despite good industrial relations and high productivity, some companies are closed down and sold off. That has happened in the whisky and tobacco industries. The Hanson organisation has a deplorable record on that. Surely the Secretary of State must recognise that some of the investment is involved in asset stripping. What will he do about that?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman's example most certainly does not refer to foreign investment in this country. One cannot fossilise the distribution of a particular industrial capacity at any one moment. We must allow firms to expand by acquisition, subject to our competitive rules, if need be.

Foreign investment in this country is an indicator of our attraction for manufacturing and industry in general. It is true that even within the Community we are attracting investment from other Community countries. In recent years, West Germany has invested more in the United Kingdom than in any other country. Do Opposition Members, or any hon. Members, seriously believe that Nissan, Toyota, Bosch and many others would have come to this country to invest if we had suffered the policies advocated and pursued by the Labour Party and previous Labour Governments?

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the foreign companies he has named have come to Britain because of the direct involvement of Labour local authorities? Those companies have invested in various regions of Britain and Scotland because of the direct efforts of Labour local authorities, which have redoubled their attempts to create new employment opportunities. The truth is that Labour local authorities have brought foreign investment into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: When I went to Japan the week before last, I spoke to many representatives of Japanese companies that have invested or are thinking about investing in this country. Not one said that the principle attraction, or any attraction, was provided by Labour local authorities.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does that mean that the right hon. Gentleman did not speak to anyone from Nissan or Komatsu who regularly acknowledge the contribution made by the former Tyne and Wear county council when reaching their decision to invest in that area?

Mr. Lilley: I spoke to people from those companies. I am not saying that they have not got on with local authorities, but they simply did not list them as one of the attractions of this country.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): My right hon. Friend is right to quote the success of inward investment, but it is equally revealing to study one of the most important British firms, British Steel. Under the Labour Government, that company was losing £500 million a year and it employed three people for every job. Now, however, it is competitive and it is making nearly £500 million a year. Does my right hon. Friend agree that British Steel is almost the best example that one could quote to prove that, if one gets the conditions right, industry is able to prosper?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a great strength of this country that we now have a steel industry that is one of the most profitable in the world, not excluding the steel industry of Japan. The Leader of the Opposition may want to interfere in the operations of British Steel, but we would prefer it to continue its healthy course since privatisation.

The diagnosis proffered by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was hazy, his prognosis wrong, and his prescription about as hard to decipher as that issued by the average doctor. I listened hard when he said, "Now I come to the measures we must take." I found it difficult to decipher the meaning of his message. Instead of a spot-the-ball competition, we are faced with a spot-the-policy one—the hon. Gentleman's hand points in one direction, but his eyes are looking in another. The one place one knows those policies will not be found is on firm ground. They will be somewhere up in the air, probably in the hot air, because those policies consist of phrases such as "encouragement for," "a regional policy" or "priority must be given"—there is no specification behind those words.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): My right hon. Friend will recall that, as part of his prescription for the future, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) spoke about the importance of training. Can my right hon. Friend recall any instance in the past few years when the Labour party has supported any training initiative? The theory does not match the practice. The hon. Gentleman talks about encouraging young people to get qualifications, but my right hon. Friend will recall the Labour party's total opposition to the youth training scheme and employment training. In my area, the Labour party is strongly opposed

[Mrs. Maureen Hicks]

to the training and enterprise council, where industry works with business and the Government. Can my right hon. Friend think of an occasion when the Labour party supported a training initiative?

Mr. Lilley: I am afraid that I cannot recall an occasion when the Labour party took a positive attitude towards any of the initiatives we have taken.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East also appeared to be unaware of some existing policies. He proudly proclaimed that he intended to introduce a guaranteed training programme for school leavers. Apparently he is unaware that it already exists, in the form of the youth training scheme and its successors.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that every school leaver is automatically guaranteed training? That is not true.

Mr. Lilley: We have guaranteed that school leavers who cannot find jobs will have access to training programmes——

Mr. Brown: Are Conservative Members and the right hon. Gentleman unaware that 100,000 young people leave school and get a job with no training whatever?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that people will have to do a training course when they leave school instead of having the option, that represents an interesting reversal of Labour's previous opposition to the schemes that we have set up.

The Opposition had one solution to all our problems: entering the exchange rate mechanism. I thought that their policy was still to maintain our membership of the ERM, but it seems from what they are calling for now that they would abandon it—because that is what a devaluation of sterling would amount to, and devaluation would be the inevitable result of their calls for a premature cut in interest rates or for increases in public expenditure.

The Opposition claimed to recognise that the exchange rate mechanism had the virtue of encouraging stability and discipline, but they now seem willing to forgo that stability and abandon that discipline. Instead, they give us vague references to the need for training, research and development and regional support. I have scanned about 15 speeches by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East; in each of them he said that he wants new policies for training, R and D and regional support—but those policies remain as elusive as ever. What is more, the hon. Gentleman has not spelt out whether the Opposition would increase public expenditure, and if they would, by how much and when.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Secretary of State went off the exchange rate mechanism rather quickly. What is his assessment of the impact of entry into the ERM, at the crazy rate at which the Government entered, on industry and unemployment?

Mr. Lilley: The exchange rate of DM2·95 means that we remain roughly within the 6 per cent. band against the Deutschmark for the three years before entry. So the entry rate was exactly in line with what industy had been coping with for the previous three years, during which time it had greatly increased exports, thus showing that it was not uncompetitive. If the Labour party claims that we should devalue after we have been in the EMS for a matter of a few months, that is interesting. I say that devaluation would be the inevitable consequence of the policies proposed by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and of his reckless disregard for the constraints that the exchange rate imposes on freedom of action in the matter of interest rates.

Mr. Kinnock: What is the main reason why the Government keep interest rates at the highest levels of any developed country? Is it that they fear that, if they were to reduce them, as industry needs, there would be a substantial fall in the value of the pound against the deutschmark?

Mr. Lilley: I am saying that a premature reduction in interest rates would be unwise—

Mr. Gordon Brown: Why?

Mr. Lilley: I accept the judgment of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, just as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said that he would accept the judgment of his right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor, which was that we could cut interest rates now with no impact on the exchange rate. At no time has the right hon. and learned Gentleman advocated anything other than a reduction in interest rates. His advice is so one-sided as scarcely to constitute good judgment.

Mr. Budgen: My right hon. Friend says that he will accept the judgment of the Chancellor on when it is safe to reduce interest rates. Is it not inevitable that the people who really decide when it is safe to reduce them will be foreign holders of sterling; and that he will rely most of all on the judgment, first, of the Governor of the Bank of England and, more importantly perhaps, of other European central bankers, who will say, according to their knowledge of foreign speculators, when it is safe to reduce interest rates?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend's concern about speculators, given his well-known desire to rely on an exchange rate in which speculation is allowed free rein, is interesting. The House decided, with the support of Members on the Opposition Front Bench, that we would enhance our anti-inflationary posture by pegging our exchange rate against those of the continent. In my judgment, that increases downward pressure on inflation, and as a result we shall more rapidly reduce inflation and thus in turn be able to reduce interest rates and return to non-inflationary growth. But a premature reduction of interest rates, in or out of the exchange rate mechanism, would not benefit the economy because it would mean that, far from our getting inflation down, it would take off again.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the right hon. Gentleman expand on this point, as it is critical? Is he saying that, because of the downward pressure on demand, as he delicately puts it, imposed by high interest rates, inflation will eventually fall roughly to German levels, and such will be the confidence in the international markets that the pound will stay at DM2·95 regardless of the fact that interest rates in Britain are much lower?

Mr. Lilley: I am not sure what the purpose of this little seminar is. The right hon. Gentleman may have forgotten that he has advocated our membership of the system——

Mr. Gordon Brown: So has the right hon. Gentleman himself.

Mr. Lilley: I have advocated it since I have been a member of the Government, since 1987.

The whole purpose of membership is to enable us to get inflation down and as a result have lower interest rates. I am not sure what the right hon. Gentleman is trying to elicit beyond that.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does not my right hon. Friend find it rather strange that, only a year ago, the Leader of the Opposition was saying that we had to have high interest rates because we were not in the ERM, but that now he is saying the opposite: because we are in it, we have to keep interest rates high?

Mr. Lilley: Like my hon. Friend, I find the position adopted by the Leader of the Opposition a little difficult to follow.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East offered increased spending on training as his magic solution to all our problems. He was prepared to contemplate that increased training even though it would come from a levy. He ignored the fact that the Government are spending two and a half times as much as the Labour Government did on vocational training—a clear sign that the last Labour Government did not attach the priority to the subject that this Government do. Industry is also spending a great deal more on training. It is estimated that it is spending £20 billion a year on it. That is made possible by the improvement in profitability of British industry, which is our key to improvement in the strength of British industry.

The Opposition have never spelt out, when challenged, whether and when they will provide more money for the policies that they advocate. When challenged directly on that point, Labour's spokesman admits that industrial support is not one of the key priorities to which the party is committed and on which it will immediately increase expenditure. Expenditure on training, research and development and regional policy, would, say the Opposition, be increased only as and when new resources become available.

The Opposition are in a logical bind. Are Labour policies necessary to generate faster growth, or is faster growth necessary to afford Labour's policies? They have to explain on which side of the dilemma they have come down.

Mr. Roger King: I shall not vote for them.

Mr. Lilley: That is a relief to us all.

By contrast, the Government's policies and priorities are consistent and clear. Above all, we believe that it is essential to persist with the cure for the underlying problem of inflation, painful though that cure is in the short term, and to reinforce the supply side measures that will enhance the long-term health of our industry. These measures include further deregulation, taking forward the reforms that we have already introduced with such good effect into industries such as telecommunications. They include the encouragement of competition, to act as a stimulus to growth and improved performance.

They include privatisation, where our programme of setting businesses free from the shackle of state control will not stop at the 42 major businesses that have so far been liberated. The success of this programme, under which virtually every privatised company has increased its revenue, its profitability and its investment and improved its investor relations, means that we should pursue that policy further.

Our measures also include reduction in taxes, whenever conditions permit, and this has been an important part of strengthening our industrial position. We shall continue with it as and when it is prudent to do so. Without lower taxes, we should not have had increased investment in enterprise, and without that there would not have been the new businesses and the reduction in unemployment that we have seen since 1983.

Wider share ownership is a key part of our programme, particularly employee share ownership, which, combined with our trade union reform, has brought about enormous improvements in our labour relations. Perhaps the most significant of all these is reducing the barriers to trade facing our industry, both within Europe and in the wider world, and maintaining a stable international trading system. That is why we attach high importance to the completion of the internal market—a factor not mentioned by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—and the opening up of eastern Europe, which will provide immense opportunities for British businesses.

GATT has served us well for the past 40 years. Industrial tariffs have come down from about 40 per cent. in 1947 to around 5 per cent. and, over the same period, world trade has increased by more than eight times.

Mr. Roger King: My right hon. Friend is saying that our industrial and commercial position is one of a world player, a necessary component of which is the ability to move capital about the world. Would he care to reflect on the effect that any Labour policy for reintroducing exchange control would have on company growth?

Mr. Lilley: I have heard the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, say that he would try to stop speculative flows. That would not be possible under the capital liberalisation directive within Europe, let alone within our wider agreement. I imagine that the Labour party has abandoned any proposal for the restriction of trade and imports.

GATT is a key part of our strategy for increasing the opportunities for British industry. We have done all in our power to ensure the success of the Uraguay round because Britain, as a prime trading nation, stands to gain more from success and to lose more from failure than most other countries. Liberalisation of trade in services could boost world trade in services by 10 per cent. Rules on intellectual property would stem the huge losses from counterfeiting and piracy which cost United Kingdom drug and textile companies some £50 million a year and the record industry hundreds of millions of pounds.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is wrong to say that economic slowdown is being experienced only in this country, because it is strong in the United States, in Canada and in Australasia, and it is beginning to be felt in France and Italy, although Germany and Japan remain buoyant. At a time of world economic slowdown, we need a non-inflationary stimulus. The only thing that can provide that is the opening of markets and the reduction in tariffs that a successful GATT round will bring about.

If we pursue our policies of deregulation, competition and privatisation, and of opening up markets, and if we persist in our policies to defeat inflation, our opportunities in the 1990s will be even greater than those we enjoyed in

[Mr. Lilley]

the 1980s. The strength that this economy built up during the 1980s will be manifest, and rewards will be reaped during the 1990s. Therefore, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the amendment.

Mr. Biffen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, concerning the proceedings of the debate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, with his customary courtesy, gave way to every hon. Gentleman who wished to intervene. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), by contrast, showed an understandable and virginal reluctance to enagage in parliamentary debate. Will our proceedings record that relevant fact?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The right hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record.

4.55 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am sure that I speak for my hon. Friends who represent the north-west when I say that few will begin to understand the speech made by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry or the world in which he lives. Surely one of the saddest places in Britain is the north-west of England, the birthplace of the industrial revolution and the region that possibly has Britain's finest skilled work force. Many of these people find themselves languishing on the dole with a bleak outlook that gets bleaker by the weeks, thanks to the Government's disastrous economic policies.

The population of the north-west—some 7 million—is the second largest in Britain, after London and the south-east. Its work force, despite the difficulties, contributes to the national economy more than any other British region, except London and the south-east, accounting for around 10 per cent. of gross domestic product and one eighth of the nation's manufacturing output. The north-west is suffering along with the rest of the country but rather more severely than most in the manufacturing sector. I hope that the Secretary of State will listen to a voice from the north-west, because I know that he does not pay much attention to the problems of the region as he goes around.

In the 20-plus years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have marvelled at the many business men, in my constituency and beyond, who have told me, when I have asked them how they have fared, that they have fared better under a Labour Government. However, when asked how they vote, they invariably say that they vote Tory, for some personal tax gain or other. That attitude is changing and changing fast. More and more, those same business men and women are listening to what my right hon. and hon. Friends are saying about the economic, industrial and employment fronts.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and my hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) are making a deep impression on these people by arguing the case for creating a strong and dynamic economy, for a commitment to training for our young people, our workers and our managers and for making sure that this economic and training strategy is carried out with the Government backing industry rather than getting on its back.

It is no surprise that support for the Government is ebbing, particularly that from small businesses and shopkeepers who mistakenly trusted the Government and were rewarded with the uniform business rate, high inflation and crippling interest rates. Any sane person knows that, given the crucial importance of manufacturing to our nation's future, the Government must do everything they can to give our industrial regions the backing and encouragement they will need if they are to meet the challenges of Europe and beyond. Yet, at the moment, that backing is singularly lacking.

For example, in my local area of Tameside, I hear from almost every quarter—employers, trade unions and local authorities—that the Government are failing us. I hear this message from the north-west chamber of commerce, which recently published a quarterly economic survey, the region's biggest and most comprehensive survey, covering 536 firms in the north-west employing over 87,000 people. That revealed that, for the first time, nearly half the firms surveyed reported that orders and deliveries were down —46 per cent. of firms reported a drop in home orders and 40 per cent. a drop in export orders. That is far from the world of which the Secretary of State has just painted a picture. It is not the result of Labour party research; it comes from those who are traditionally seen as the Conservatives' friends—the business organisations of the north-west.

In a letter that I received only yesterday, the north-west chamber of commerce says:

> "Industry in the north-west ended the year in a pessimistic mood. Profits, investment and employment are predicted to fall further in 1991. However companies are still reporting skill shortages around the region, thus emphasising the need for training."

Mr. McCartney: Is it not also the case that the National Westminster bank's recent survey of the north-west forecasts an increase in unemployment of more than 50 per cent. between January this year and May next year as a direct result of interest rates and other Government policies?

Mr. Pendry: My hon. Friend is right. I could quote from other surveys of the area. I took a current one, and one to which I hoped Conservative Members would respond, as it consulted many of their former supporters.

What has been the Government's response to the region's needs? They have implemented cuts of £3·32 million—an horrific 25 per cent.—in employment training throughout the Manchester training and enterprise council area. On top of that, they have cut £3·29 million—19 per cent.—from youth training, thus betraying future generations as well as the present. No wonder more and more people are turning to Labour. They know that high-quality training is a vital ingredient of our economic strategy and will deliver the goods.

It is not just business men and women in the north-west who view the present situation and future prospects with alarm. Their pessimism is shared by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants which was commissioned by Manchester TEC early last year to undertake a labour market assessment of the region. It predicted that a startling 13,000 manufacturing jobs will be lost in the Manchester TEC area before 1995 and that 2,900 of those jobs will be lost in Tameside alone—9 per cent. of all its manufacturing employment. On top of that, it predicts a

further loss in the Manchester TEC area of nearly 5,000 jobs in the engineering sector and 3,500 in metals, minerals and chemicals.

My area needs actions not words. However, when I challenged the former Prime Minister to honour the promise made by her Secretary of State for the Environment during the campaign to bring the Olympics to Manchester that the Government would inject £3 billion of investment into the north-west's infrastructure, she could only flounder and say that the Duke of Westminster had great faith in the north-west's infrastructure. Then she went on to renege on that promise, clearly given by the current chairman of the Conservative party, and claimed that no such undertaking to provide investment had been given.

What sort of insult is that to my constituents and to others in the north-west? With the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) happily now departed, I repeat that challenge to her successor. Will he back the north-west and give it the urgently needed and promised investment, or is he determined to carry on the same policies of industrial neglect at No. 10 that he pursued as Chancellor from the house next door?

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): My hon. Friend puts the case well for the north-west. Does he agree that the recent report from the Building Employers Confederation, which says that the north-west is going into a deep bitter building recession, is an indictment of the Government when there are stockpiles of bricks and when we have unemployed construction workers and homeless people on our streets, particularly in Manchester?

Mr. Pendry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for underlining my point. We all got that message last week from the confederation.

I hear strongly the message from my local council, Tameside, that the Government have failed us. It tells me that, during 1990, just under 1,000 redundancies in Tameside were notified to the Department of Employment, and that figure is itself only a small proportion of those which were not notified.

Using the Department of the Environment's own methods for analysing deprivation, the second largest major area of need in Greater Manchester is the old industrial area which runs from Oldham through the Tameside centres of Ashton, Dukinfield and Hyde. On the Department's own figures, 10 of the 18 wards in that large belt are inside Tameside, yet the Government refuse to grant the council access to urban programme funding to aid urban development. That is amazing. They give aid to smaller areas within Greater Manchester, such as Wigan, Bolton, Oldham and Rochdale—I am not arguing that they should have their funding cut; they need it too—but Tameside's case for aid is overwhelming when compared with those similar areas.

The average wage rate in Tameside is £3·42 per hour —more than 40 per cent. lower than the Greater Manchester average. One area of Tameside that has particular need for aid is the neighbourhood renewal area in Hyde. The council estimates that 600 businesses need to be regenerated within that area alone, yet it does not have access to city grant. Despite the obvious need for aid, the Government refuse to heed the pleas of Tameside council. That is a disgrace and I hope that the Secretary of State listens and changes that.

I hear the message from the trade union organisations and campaign groups in my area that the Government have failed us. They tell me that despite the Government's attempts to blame job losses and closures on high wage demands and restrictive practices, in reality industrial decline has gone hand in hand with the promotion of a "low pay, low skill and no rights" economy.

The Greater Manchester low pay unit has highlighted the plight of homeworkers in my constituency. One worker in Tameside makes Christmas crackers for just over 2p each. That meant making 70 crackers an hour in the run-up to Christmas for the princely sum of £1·50. The north-west is painfully aware of the urgent need for a commitment to training, funding and urban regeneration. That awareness is spread right across the board. We want commitment to our area—commitment to investment, training and aid.

The Government must act now and give that commitment if they have any economic strategy at all for the north-west. If they do not act to aid the north-west and the rest of the country's manufacturers, they will continue to sow the seeds of their own destruction when election day comes. Let us hope that that day will come before our industries have to reap further the deadly harvest of neglect.

5.7 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House because I have a throat infection. No doubt it will be welcomed on both sides of the House, as it means that my speech will be much shorter that it would otherwise be. If it is terminated abruptly, I am sure that my hon. Friends will, as usual, take up the threads of what I was saying.

As an industrialist, I declare an interest. Looking round the House I notice, somewhat wryly, that out of 650 Members, only about 20 are present to debate a subject of fundamental importance to Britain's future. The House never pays enough attention to the creation of wealth, yet no doubt it would be nearly full if we were debating the spending of it.

I pay particular tribute to British industry, which is working so well and efficiently in supporting our forces in the Gulf. It is particularly inspiring to see the way in which workers throughout Britain, without thought of their home time, are supporting our forces.

The core of today's debate must be how to increase our economy's competitiveness. Nowhere is that more important than within government itself, enhancing the Government's ability to be an efficient employer by increasing their productivity at all times. Neither the Government nor industry appear to appreciate that the number of school leavers who will be available for employment over the next five years will fall by 20 per cent. Nowhere will that be more significant than in Government Departments, which are the most labour-intensive employers in the country. Unless action is taken soon, the Departments of Health, Social Security and Employment will all confront a crisis, with Government wages beginning to chase those in outside industry in order to attract scarce labour.

I should like to see an end to some of the in-fighting that occurs in Government agencies, which inhibits British industry's ability to compete throughout the world. In recent days, there has been much publicity about edicts

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issued by the Civil Aviation Authority on the concept of open skies at Heathrow, which would involve handing over Tokyo airline routes from British Airways to Virgin Atlantic Airways. That may sound a commendable idea, but it does not recognise that our efficient airline industry will risk being damaged as a consequence of the CAA pursuing its own objectives. I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will become involved in those negotiations, to ensure that the industry's potential and ability to operate are not harmed by fanciful theories from Kingsway.

I am also concerned about the way in which Oftel views the British telecomunications industry. The review currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry reflects more the interest that Oftel has in cutting British Telecom down to size than the need to develop British Telecom and Mercury as players on the stage of world markets. If Oftel's proposals are allowed to progress, they will allow the entry into our own market of American bidders, without the reciprocity that would allow the United Kingdom to compete in the market across the Atlantic. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will also consider it a good idea to get moving with the sale of part of the Government's holding in British Telecom, which is far too large.

I draw attention also to the conflict between the national engineering laboratory, which is a field of seed corn for improving British industry's competitiveness. Its facility at East Kilbride has endured two years of uncertainty over whether it will be privatised, and in that time it has lost one third of its qualified scientists and engineers. Their numbers have fallen from 625 to 400 because the staff there do not know what will happen in the future.

My right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Cabinet could also intervene in bringing the wages councils to heel and perhaps abolishing many of them. A 10 per cent. increase in wages from April has been proposed, which may be very nice for those who will receive it, but many small companies cannot afford to meet it. I know of examples in my own constituency of small firms of electricians that are going out of business because they cannot afford to pay higher wages. I hope that remedial action will be taken in that regard.

As to the Government's role as a customer, if Britain's industrial ability is to be enhanced, the quality of purchasing by the Government—as the largest single buyer in the country—must improve. That is true not only of the Ministry of Defence but of all Departments whose purchasing power dominates the market. The House frequently debates information technology, and I will not go over that ground again—but I remind right hon. and hon. Members that, of the £4 billion of data processing equipment purchased by the Government, about half is bought by the Ministry of Defence, but the other half is the subject of ad hoc purchases by different Departments, guided by no central policy on what form of data processing should be developed.

There was some acrimony in the Select Committee on Trade and Industry over why the Government do not encourage the development of wideband technology. That should be done not only because many banks, insurance companies and mail order operations would like to invest in such a system rather than merely purchase time on one, but because the Government themselves could make substantial use of such a facility, as it would allow Departments to combat the fall in the number of people available for employment.

One questions the quality of purchasing leadership across Government Departments. It is worrying that, in terms of helping develop British industry and trade, not one of the country's top 42 civil servants has a degree in science, mathematics or engineering. In the countries that are our main competitors—America, Japan, Germany and France—such experts are part of their country's civil service establishment, and are encouraged to make a contribution to their domestic industries throughout their careers.

The improvement that Government could make through only a small increase in their investment in industry is epitomised by recent figures relating to the Science and Engineering Research Council. Each year, it considers the most highly rated—alpha-rated—research projects. Whereas, 10 years ago, 90 per cent. of the projects submitted received funding, the figure is only 60 per cent. today. Such projects represent the really glamorous seed corn from which British industry could prosper in five or 10 years' time.

I ask my right hon. Friend to consider the way in which the suggestions that I have made could be applied not only to his Department but many others. There should be more co-ordination between Government Departments, which should see themselves as sponsors of industry, buyers of industrial projects, and setters of pace in research.

Britain's eternal competitiveness is something from which no part of industry can escape. We have a propensity to offset cost-of-living increases by higher wages that are unmatched by higher sales in overseas markets. At no time is that more difficult to combat than when those overseas markets themselves are suffering the same world recession that is affecting this country. Conquering those markets will be an enormous task, but I am confident that the present Government are far more likely to help win that battle than a Labour Administration. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State challenged the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and other Opposition Members to say how they would reduce inflation, none of them could reply. The Opposition's rhetoric is as hollow as the debate that they have sought to promote today.

5.17 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The recession is a reality, and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry did not deny it. Nor did he pretend that it is simply a stage in an economic cycle that the Government had wholly anticipated. Yesterday's Confederation of British Industry's survey hammered home some of the manifestations of that recession. The proportion of companies preparing to cut employment is the largest since April 1981; over the next four months, output is set to fall at the fastest rate since October 1980; capital spending is being cut; and business confidence is now at its lowest since October 1980.

The Government have been in power for more than 10 years, so how could such a significant recession arise? Ten years ago, Ministers stressed that it would take a little time

to solve the fundamental economic problems that confronted them. Even as recently as 1982, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), said:

"We made it plain, too, that reversing this decline would require a major effort—an effort that would need to be sustained over the lifetime of more than one Parliament. And so it will be."

How many Parliaments do they need—one, two or three? They have had three Parliaments in which to deal with these fundamental problems. I quote again the arguments advanced by the right hon. and learned Gentleman in 1982 when he said:

"The 1979 oil shock made the task of restoring our economy both more urgent and much more difficult. And it coincided with the surge in pay, and public spending, which the outgoing Government bequeathed to us."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1982; Vol. 19 c. 727-28.]

The outgoing Government argument has lost its currency. It is no longer available. It cannot be used of the Secretary of State's colleagues, because he shared with them the responsibility for government by the same party and according to the same policies.

So the hopes of those years have not been fulfilled. Let us look back to 1983 and the Conservative manifesto for the election year which stated:

"During the years of recession, now coming to an end, even the most successful of our competitors have faced increasingly serious problems and mounting unemployment. Despite all these difficulties, the Conservative Government has been overcoming Britain's fundamental problems . . . The foundations of recovery have been firmly laid. In the next Parliament, we shall build on this progress."

That was two Parliaments ago, and we still have a recession.

Some things have been done and the Secretary of State sought to outline them in his speech. He referred to deregulation, privatisation, and competition—where I would take issue with him, if it were the subject of debate, because I do not think that the Government have done much to promote competition, certainly not in the electricity privatisation for example. He might wish to add to his list promotion of the concept of private enterprise and challenging monopolistic power of the trade unions. Let us put them all on the list as things which the Government have sought to do to tackle these fundamental problems.

Yet we still have a serious recession. Why is that so? First, it is because of incompetent economic management by the Government—the creation of boom conditions by the simultaneous imposition of tax cuts, credit liberalisation and the delayed ending of multiple mortgage tax relief. It was simply incompetent to do all those things at once, and not to recognise what the consequences would be.

The Secretary of State said earlier that further tax cuts would be carried out when it was prudent to do so. I wonder whether he thinks that it was prudent to carry out tax cuts in previous circumstances. They led to the boom which has led to the recession that we now face. They led to the boom which brought about the inflation to which present policies are geared.

The second reason was short-sightedness—for example, short-sightedness over Europe, when there was a long delay over Britain's entry to the exchange rate mechanism. Another example is the failure to invest in channel tunnel rail links. The French Government take a much more long-sighted view than the British Government, and do not attempt, on ideological grounds, to insist that every penny of investment in the rail link must carry a return to the railway, and that there must be a straight commercial investment. The French knew that they could not take full advantage of the tunnel in that way, and they have invested seriously.

Another reason is the Government's tendency to look towards the next election, rather than to the longer term, or even to look merely to the next party conference. That was what determined the timing of the drop in interest rates which led to our entry into the exchange rate mechanism, and it is a very short-sighted view of how the economy should be managed.

The reasons for the recession were partly incompetence, partly short-sightedness and partly the failure to drive inflation out of the system. On the Government's own admission, underlying inflation is still likely to be around 6 per cent. by the third and fourth quarter of this year. The Government have clearly failed to drive inflation out of the system.

Why is the fact that inflation is still part of our system so bad, especially in this context? It is because inflation changes the relationship between people in society, in arbitrary and unfair ways. It reduces borrowers' liabilities, and reduces savers' capital. At the same time, it makes it more profitable to trade in pieces of paper than to trade in manufactured goods—in an era of price instability, riding on the back of inflationary increases by paper transactions is more profitable than making something and selling it. Inflation makes property a happier investment haven than industry. For all those reasons inflation is a direct source of the problems that we face today, as well as a cause of the high interest rates which are adding to those problems.

There is still no real sign that the Government will be able to keep inflation out of the system if we get out of the recession. One aspect of the Government's arguments today that worries me is that they seem to suggest that it is necessary for the recession to continue this year to help drive inflation out of the system, but that it will all be over in due course—in time, they hope, for a general election. When it is all over, they say, inflation will have been driven out of the system. I see no sign that that is the case. At the moment, our only aid for driving inflation out of the system is membership of the ERM, and that has a price. Lack of confidence in Britain's ability to drive inflation out of the system is what makes sterling vulnerable and it leads to the necessity to keep high interest rates to maintain sterling's parity within that system.

What must be done if the recession is to be cured without damaging anti-inflation policy? Action clearly needs to be taken to help Britain our of the recession. Investment in transport, training—not merely training for the unemployed—and education is necessary. The real giveaway about the Government's training policy is that, when challenged about it, they always relate it to unemployment. In the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, when we challenged the Government about last year's budget cuts in training, the cuts were justified on the basis that unemployment had gone down and, therefore, there were fewer people to train.

When the Secretary of State was challenged today about the position of school leavers he insisted that training opportunities were available for every unemployed school leaver. That is not what training is about. Training is about providing those in jobs, as well as those not in jobs, with the skills required to make industry more

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

competitive. It is a crucial area for investment, and so are science and research and regional investment, which becomes more necessary because we are locked into an exchange rate system in which distortions cannot be corrected in any other way. Therefore, it becomes that much more necessary to ensure that investment, through public expenditure, is directed towards regions which have been left behind, and would seem more likely to be left behind by developments in Europe—regions not physically close to the economic centres of Europe.

None of that investment must be stopped on account of the Gulf war. Those of us who are most supportive of the prosecution of that war, and of the way in which the Prime Minister has conducted the nation's affairs in this matter, are nevertheless strongly insistent that it must not be used as an excuse for not carrying out essential investment in those areas.

The Budget must take special account of industry's needs. Obviously it is vital to bring down interest rates if we are to get out of this recession—that is the most widely stressed demand from industry. If one goes to any gathering of industrialists one will realise that the continued high level of interest rates is their greatest anxiety. However, it will not be easy to get interest rates down while our anti-inflation credibility is so low. That is why we believe that the freedom to achieve a substantial cut in interest rates also depends upon filling the anti-inflationary gap, and it leads us to believe that Labour's prescriptions will have the same disastrous side effects that they produced before, if they are not accompanied by firm anti-inflationary policy. Industry needs investment and lower interest rates, but it certainly does not need inflation. Serious inflation is a serious threat to manufacturing industry.

The Chancellor will make his Budget assessment in an especially uncertain atmosphere, and it is difficult to predict the economic consequences of the Gulf war. They are likely to be more far reaching then is implied by arguments about who contributes how much to our costs of participating in that war. It is important that we ensure that Britain gets support from our partners in the Community for the military effort that we are putting in, and that we get support from the United States when the reimbursement is shared between all those countries, including ourselves, that are providing a military commitment. There is, I believe, considerable admiration in the United States for the extent of Britain's commitment.

None of that, however, will prove as important as the response of the world economy to the war. What will happen to oil prices and to German interest rates, for instance? The atmosphere is one of uncertainty; but it is absolutely certain that, if the Chancellor ducks the obligation to stimulate the key investment that is needed to make our industry more competitive, he will do both industry and the future of this country a terrible disservice.

5.30 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): I strongly support what was said by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), whose remarks about the damaging effects of inflation must have struck a chord throughout the House.

I suppose that enabling the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to have a bit of party political fun with the downturn in the economy is an inevitable part of the democratic process in the House of Commons. He seems, however, to have ignored—perhaps for party political reasons—the fact that what we are experiencing is an economic cycle, which is moving downwards not only in this country but in others; I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State cited France. There is, in fact, every chance that we shall emerge from that cycle rather earlier than some of our European competitors.

The truth is—it is in this context that the hollowness of the Opposition's case is most glaringly obvious to any independent eye—that we have had an extremely successful 10 or 11 years of steady growth, expansion, high profits in industry, good export trade and, as has been said, a good deal of inward investment by foreign companies. As I pointed out earlier in an intervention about British Steel, our larger firms in particular are now dominating Europe: British Steel is only one of the clearest examples of the appalling effects on the interventionist policies suffered by firms under the Labour Governments of the 1960s and 1970s. I am amazed that Opposition Members should have the effrontery even to organise a debate on industry, given their party's dreadful record.

Although he belongs to the generation that succeeded those who made all the mistakes during those years, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East appears to have learnt nothing from his elders—I will not say "elders and betters". He came out with all the old shibboleths: a bit more training here, a bit more intervention there, a quasi-National Enterprise Board—we all lived through the days of the NEB—and more regional policies. He sees all that as the panacea that British industry needs.

The outside world, however, knows very well that Britain's success over the past 10 years has been largely a result of the supply side changes that we have introduced. We have managed to reduce steeply the taxes paid by industry, as well as personal taxes. We have also allowed the great industries such as steel and shipbuilding to shed manpower—painful though that was—to enable themselves to compete with the rest of the world. Those industries are now firmly established: I believe that they will survive the present temporary downturn, and will continue to succeed in the outside world. Even at this difficualt time, our industry is in an incomparably stronger position than it was 10 years ago.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was entirely right to remind us of the damage that is done by inflation. We are suffering now from the effects of high interest rates in an attempt to slay, yet again, that dragon of inflation. It is easy enough to criticise the Government for allowing interest rates to become too low three years ago, but the Opposition's hands are by no means so clean in that regard. Leaving aside party political rhetoric, however, we must deal with inflation. To their credit and honour, the Government are prepared to suffer the pain now to knock inflation on the head. Inflation that lasts for ever is far more damaging than high interest rates which, hopefully, will last for only a short time.

The Government—particularly the Chancellor, who, unlike my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, is responsible for interest rates—should peep over the abyss and decide that it is about time to bring down interest rates. I hope that my right hon. Friend will conclude that

it is safe to do that, because the monetary figures are under control, and we know that inflation will fall very rapidly during the rest of the year. We must also continue to introduce supply side changes. Let us, for heaven's sake, carry on with a policy that has been successful before. We must maintain the momentum of the tax reform programme that has achieved so much over the past 10 years. That, too, is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Although Britain's large firms have done well over the past decade, and although we have created many small firms, there is a gap at present, comparatively unfilled by the medium-sized manufacturing companies that are so plentiful in some of our competitor countries. Perhaps it is dangerous for a politician to interfere, and there is probably little that we in the House can do about it, apart from continuing our supply side changes.

A persistent complaint from firms of that kind—almost more important than the complaints about interest rates, which we know will fall—is their inability to secure "term loans". This is a bad habit of the British banking system: too many independent, unquoted firms have traditionally borrowed on overdraft. That can be very dangerous. During a recession, when the banks start looking at some of their bad debts and worrying about their position, they can bear down on firms that may be quite healthy in order to help themselves.

It may be said that that is the system, and indeed it is; but it results all too frequently in damage being done to healthy independent firms with perhaps 200 or 300 employees. Germany has more term lending, and in Japan —I am leaving aside the question of interest rates—there is a long tradition of allowing independent small companies to take out loans for up to 20 years. That is completely unknown in Britain.

Industry also needs to make its voice heard in relation to the future of Europe. It is crucial that we succeed in establishing a single internal market—a free market. Let me say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has a good deal of responsibility as a spokesman for Britain, that there is a real danger of our failing to establish that market by 1 January 1993 if Europe continues to be deflected in the direction of hares that have no relevance to the task. That, of course, is monetary union, and, even worse, political union.

I say this to my right hon. Friend, who must fight the battles in Brussels and elsewhere on the Continent: please fight for the success of the internal market—the nitty-gritty, the nuts and bolts. A discussion paper published by the European Commission deals with money transfers in Europe, an important factor for those who will do business across this huge market. It suggests a mechanism linking a national automatic clearing house, "perhaps in the form of a pan-European clearing House. To illustrate this point, the Commission paper said 25 per cent. of payments in a sample of 144 transfers from France to Germany took more than 10 days to arrive; two per cent. took more than six weeks, and two had not arrived 12 months later."

That shows that there is a long way to go in establishing an effective internal market when money transfers across the continent take so long, compared with the United Kingdom, where money can be transferred electronically within seconds. It is no good companies doing business in Europe if they cannot get their money, or if it takes so long to arrive that it undermines their profits.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must ensure that he counteracts the underlying collectivist, protectionist and nationalisation ideas that still exist in the minds of some of our European partners. Such beliefs will not establish a successful European market. He must carry on the successful principles of the Government and ensure that they are spread throughout the European Community. The changes that we have made have served us very well indeed.

I foresee interest rates falling soon, but we must remain in a low interest rate regime. We must have stability—that is another great cry of industry—and, above all, in Europe we must ensure that the free market is established. If we can achieve those aims, our success in the past 10 years will be carried on even more strongly in the 10 years ahead, during which I am sure this country will continue to have a Conservative Government.

5.41 pm

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): First, I declare an interest. I think that I am the only member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union here. My union knows about recession; it experiences recession through its membership. That has been made clear by Gavin Laird and Mr. Jordan.

Things must be judged by reality. A recession, or a slump, must be judged by the factors that are known to us. It must be judged by unemployment, manufacturing output, bankruptcies, investment, interest rates, inflation and so on, all of which add up to a massive trade deficit. The Government, who speak of sound housekeeping, cannot balance the books. They cannot keep the sums under control to prevent the British people from suffering.

Conservative Members are looking for a fall guy. They say that it is all the fault of Thatcherism. But Thatcherism is another name for monopoly capitalism—a system that is unfair, inefficient, corrupt and dangerous. It is unfair because it concentrates wealth in fewer hands, inefficient because it cannot produce the goods, and corrupt because it justifies tax evasion and stock exchange fiddles. It is dangerous because it engages in military adventures, as we are seeing in the Gulf.

If there is a crisis here—it must be admitted that there is, otherwise we would not be having this debate—there is also a crisis worldwide, which, sadly, is hitting many developing countries that do not have a voice in this Chamber.

Britain's economic ills are blamed on the working class —on British workers. The excuse of Conservative Members is that we have changed Prime Ministers, but the medicine bottle remains the same; only the label has been replaced.

In the past, Tories said that wages were too high. The argument was, "Price yourself in or out of a job or get on your bike." The working class were told that repeatedly, but it was not said to police chiefs, generals or judges. Of course that was not said to the bigwigs, but it was said to the working class.

British workers are the coolies of Europe, and that has been known for some time. Conservative Members should not smile about that. If low wages were a panacea for Britain's economic problems, the Indian economy would be the boom economy of the world, but it is not. Conservative Members know that low wages do not solve anything. They justify skinflint employers and clapped out

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machinery and plant, which is what has been going on. That is why British industry was decimated. Many factories were closed because they could not compete with the efficient industries of Germany and Japan. They could not face up to the fact that those countries had more modern equipment and tried to do things on the cheap.

Training and apprenticeships were discouraged by this Government. Instead, Mrs. Thatcher and others encouraged cheap, phoney labour schemes. What did that do? It did nothing for the British economy and little for the people who were exploited. It did nothing for those youngsters who had few rights, but who suffered appalling injuries and did not receive any compensation whatsoever. That is the legacy of the past.

Figures produced by the EEC show that 62 per cent. of Britain's industrial workers are unskilled, compared with 38 per cent. in Germany, 31 per cent. in Italy and 20 per cent. in France. That sums it up and it is a disgrace. We must always remember that our greatest asset is people and we should invest in them. Education and training have been neglected, as have so many other spheres that are important to the working class such as housing, the national health service and local government, which has tried to build up local economies. I am speaking not about luxuries but about essentials and what is important.

Debates on recession in industry are not held in Germany or in other major European countries, yet they do not have oil. We have had oil resources for so long, but, unbelievably, revenue from it has gone into the pockets of people who are represented by Conservative Members. I am not saying that that is done corruptly but that it is wrong and that that revenue is being misused.

What about Labour's position? We want an alternative to the Government's policies, but it is like sin—what do you put in its place? *[Laughter.]* Do not mock. The alternative will not come from the EEC. The Community has been a disaster in trading terms even on a capitalist basis. Being involved with the EEC has sunk the British economy and that is why I am against the EEC.

We must look to the future and act today. Talking about what we will achieve in future is an academic exercise. Tinkering with the economy is not enough. We need socialist policies that will take over the commanding heights of the economy under democratic control. It should be under the control of the workers. That is the only way in which we can influence what happens in Britain.

It is all very well talking about issues, but we want real control. Labour Governments have held office and a Labour Government might hold office again in the future, and we want to hold power. I speak for people outside this place. Unless we implement socialist policies we will not get anywhere. Whether Tweedledum or Tweedledee, it is unacceptable to me.

The Labour party and a future Labour Government have no mandate to run capitalism better than the Tories because the capitalist system and big business have no mandate from us outside this place. We and the working class expect something much better.

I hope that my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench understand my point of view tonight. I speak for my AEU members and I am an AEU official. I do not criticise my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, but the trade union movement and the AEU want socialist policies in answer to Tory policies.

5.51 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) referred at some length and with great passion to the far distant future and a time when he hopes to see a fundamental change in the nature of our society. However, many of my constituents have told me that the most important thing they need—not next year, not even in the next six months, but this month—is a reduction in interest rates. It lies within the Government's power to make that reduction.

Many of the prescriptions put forward by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—for example, a considerable increase in public expenditure on training and regional policies, and all those well tried and, I would argue, somewhat dubious remedies—would succeed only in a year or two years' time, if they were to succeed at all.

The plight of many of our constituents is urgent and critical. They are being crucified by very high interest rates that have been in place since the middle of 1988. We who believe in a minimal Government and that the Government's principal role is to provide sound money and not to increase public expenditure, have an important duty to decide whether lower interest rates can be delivered properly.

We have been through many fashions in respect of floating and fixed exchange rates. There is a danger in all human affairs to think about the last experiment and to conclude that something better could replace it, and then to achieve something worse. I believe that the best period of economic management pursued by this Government occurred between 1979 and 1982, when the Government pursued policies of floating exchange rates and attempted to control inflation by following a medium-term financial strategy that envisaged a steady, continuous and inexorable reduction in the rate of increase in the money supply.

Of course that did not happen without pain, a great increase in unemployment and much unpopularity. However, I contend that the alternative of fixed exchange rates—I make no distinction between fixing the pound to the dollar and fixing it to the deutschmark—which have been tried so often, have always failed. They failed in 1967, when Mr. Wilson had to devalue in humiliating circumstances. Every time I hear the present Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister say that there will be no devaluation, I remember the speeches that Mr. Wilson used to make, and I recall the horrifying humiliation that descended on his Government after he had so unwisely fixed himself to a particular value against the dollar.

We tried fixed exchange rates again in 1972, and after six weeks we came out of the snake. We have now had two experiments, because it is wrong to say that we entered the exchange rate mechanism only recently. We were informal members of that mechanism between 1986 and 1988, when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), apparently without any authority from the Prime Minister or the Cabinet, in effect pegged the pound to the deutschmark.

As a consequence, our interest rates were much too low for a long period. That created a massive increase in the money supply and a major increase in asset prices, and in particular in house prices. That was extremely popular, and it enabled the right hon. Member for Blaby to say that he had achieved an economic miracle. However, that is now, quite rightly, seen as a disaster.

Having had that recent experiment of being informal members of a fixed exchange rate mechanism, we are now entering such a mechanism on a formal basis. It just so happens that at this particular moment the way in which the pound is valued by foreign speculators requires us to have our interest rates too high for domestic reasons. For every domestic reason, interest rates should be coming down now. Asset prices have fallen, and share prices are low in real terms. House prices have fallen in both real and actual terms. Every part of the economy that is attached in any way to asset prices is having difficulty.

On an entirely political point, I noticed with interest that one of the things of which the Government are proud, according to their amendment, is the increase in new businesses. Before I entered the Chamber today, I asked the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South- East (Mr. Turner) what he thought of the position in Wolverhampton at the moment. He said that things were pretty difficult, but not as bad as the period between 1979 and 1982. He represents the Bilston area, and he reminded me of what happened to the Bilston steel works. He said to me, "The awful thing is that many of the people who took their redundancy money became self-employed. They were exactly the people who voted for Maureen Hicks. They voted Conservative for the first time while they were setting up their new businesses"——

Mr. McCartney: They will not do that again.

Mr. Budgen: No, they may not, because they have been squeezed hideously by the high interest rates. Some of those people may have borrowed £10,000 to buy a couple of vans or a lorry and become self-employed.

It is perfectly true that we cannot squeeze inflation out of the system without pain. However, let us consider the other argument. It might be possible, to retain the pound in its present setting, to have base rates at 25 per cent. That would certainly push inflation out of the system, but it is not good enough just to say, "We are doing this to push inflation out of the system." We must decide whether we are doing that in a steady, predictable way to minimise the social and economic consequences of doing so.

Of course, by hitching ourselves to the deutschmark, we are hitching ourselves to something that is unpredictable. The value of the pound against the deutschmark is not decided, as the Prime Minister suggests, simply by the differential rates of inflation: it is decided by speculators' views of the two currencies. One speculator may say that the differential rate of inflation is the most important aspect. Another person may take a view about the relative stability of the political situation. Another person may decide, for the sake of argument, that the balance of trade deficit is all-important. All those matters form part of a speculator's judgment, but a market judgment is inherently unpredictable, and that is so much less satisfactory than the medium-term financial strategy.

I am not saying that the medium-term financial strategy was absolutely perfect. There may have been unfortunate enthusiasts such as myself who had a mechanistic view of such matters and thought that it was impossible to impose it without sufficient judgment, but that system is infinitely preferable to the vagaries of hitching the pound to another exchange rate.

Unless we move away from the exchange rate mechanism as quickly as possible, we will have the humiliation of seeing our leading politicians—that applies to whatever Government there may be at the time—doing what Mr. Wilson did. They will say that there will be no devaluation, and the Governor of the Bank of England will appear on the telly, saying, "There is no devaluation," while foreign exchanges see massive sums of money being lost in intervention, and then we shall have devaluation. I do not mind whether it is called a realignment or a readjustment or any word that it is possible to fudge to retain the dignity of our leaders. What we do not want is the continuation of the unpredictability of having our currency fixed to the deutschmark.

There is, of course, another reason for having a fixed European exchange rate. It was thought by some that there were political advantages in the European exchange rate mechanism. I do not want to overrate the matter, but I should have thought that even those who are sceptical about such issues must have noticed that there has been some slight lack of uniformity in the European nation states' response to the conflict in the Gulf. I do not wish in any way to cause trouble about that.

However, if, for the sake of argument, after the last war we had imposed upon Germany a constitution that prevented them from taking part in conflicts such as that in the Gulf, and if we had split their country and then they quite understandably decided that their main energy and financial resources should be devoted towards the cost of making their reunification successful, can we be surprised that they have a rather different view of the conflict in the Gulf?

Can we be frightfully surprised that the French, with their traditional links with Iraq and their traditional habit of selling arms on what might be described as a rather more pragmatic basis than some other countries are prepared to pursue, have a different attitude towards the Gulf? Is it not obvious that the political advantages that were said to accrue from going into a European fixed exchange rate mechanism are not likely to come about?

The sooner the Government go back to the successful policies of, first, having a floating exchange rate and, secondly, having a predictable programme for slowly reducing the increase in the money supply, the better; otherwise, we shall certainly lose the election by being hitched to an unpredictable star such as the deutschmark. We shall humiliate ourselves, as so many other statesmen have humiliated themselves in the past, by fixing the currency to another currency.

6.4 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Hon. Members have listened to a devastating critique in opposition to the Government's amendment. It is not the first time that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) has set out his economic opinion in intellectual terms. Although I could not support his attitude to the free market, his critique was at least honest compared with the Secretary of State's political chicanery.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is known as "Budgie" to his friends. It is interesting that he literally blew the

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

whistle on the Government's pretence that there is no recession in the United Kingdom, that there is simply a downturn and that sacrifices are not being made by ordinary men and women, many of whom, as the hon. Gentleman said, took up the Government's promises in the past decade. In many cases they invested their own resources, not just redundancy money, and took up the opportunity of self-employment. They now find themselves riddled with debt and are desperate.

Some Conservative Back-Bench Members have sneered. They do not sneer at Opposition Members, they sneer at people who are suffering at the sharp end and who are making real sacrifices. In answer to an intervention by me, the Secretary of State himself sneered at the contributions that are being made by local authorities in an attempt to develop alternative economic policies to take account not only of what happened in the 1980s but of what needs to happen to develop alternative employment prospects and create wealth.

Despite my accent, I represent an English constituency in a former mining community in south Lancashire. Devastation was brought to the community in the 1970s, and in the 1980s in particular. The loss of tens of thousands of textile and engineering jobs has made local authorities think deeply about interventionist policies in the local economy, and about working with the private sector, public bodies and the European Community to try to develop a regeneration strategy. The Minister rejects that concept, despite the Audit Commission's report on urban regeneration and economic development clearly stating that there is a role for local government in the regeneration of the economy at local and regional level. However, the Government continue, as a matter of policy, to underrate the contribution made by local authorities.

In my area there has been a strategy, which will continue into the 1990s, of putting forward proposals, working with the private sector, and developing new job opportunities. Every time we have launched a scheme and created new jobs there have also been massive job losses. In the past few weeks there have been 800 redundancies in the Wigan travel-to-work area. That does not include the Wigan people who work in the St. Helens travel-to-work area, the Preston travel-to-work area, or the Warrington travel-to-work area.

In my area, one of the most promising new textile companies in the 1980s was developed with assistance from the local authority, and it created new jobs, training schemes and new factory arrangements. That company has announced 104 redundancies. That is not because of bad management or a lack of interest in creating new markets, it is because the Government's interest rate policy is virtually crippling the company. The Government's failure to deal with import penetration has crippled the country. That company was successful, trained its work force, had good industrial relations, and had a good working relationship with and assistance from the local authority. Yet it has had to make over 100 people redundant because of Government policies.

Gullick Dobson—a company in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott)—is one of the largest firms in the world involved in the manufacture of mining equipment. As a direct consequence of the privatisation of the electricity industry, hundreds of jobs in the mining equipment industry have been lost, and it was announced recently that there would be a further 100 redundancies by April this year. As a direct consequence of the Government's policy towards British Coal and the privatisation of the electricity industry, millions of pounds' worth of investment in mining equipment has been lost, and the market has almost totally collapsed.

That is not a case of bad management, or of the failure of the management of Gullick Dobson and its work force; it is a direct consequence of Government policies. Unless those policies are reversed, Britain will cease to have any mining technology industry, despite the fact that we have coal reserves that would last nearly 1,000 years and the fact that we have had a century of research and development connected with mining equipment.

I could go on and devleop the same theme in respect of all aspects of the local economy. Small, medium and large companies are suffering the same problems—in every case, the direct result of Government policies, rather than of a failure of management or of the work force.

Rockware plc, which is one of Britain's largest plastic and glassware companies and one that has received awards for its contribution to British industry, found itself last year with a real problem. As a result of high interest rates it could not find the resources for the machinery that, after 1992, will be necessary to develop new plastic containers and other products. Its European competitors entered the field and virtually purchased the entire market capacity. How were they able to do that? They were able to do it because the banks in their countries encourage long-term investment at low interest rates.

In addition, those Governments are prepared to use regional development funds for that purpose. I refer, for example, to the Governments of Holland and Germany. As a consequence, this company is reducing its work force by more than 100, and what has been United Kingdom capacity is being transformed into a foreign investment portfolio. I say again that this is a direct consequence of the Government's failure to create a market in which companies can take risks and take advantage of new investment opportunities.

During the 1980s Labour local authorities in the north-west had a record of success. Indeed, much of the remaining manufacturing base exists as a direct result of local authority intervention. In the early and mid-1980s the present Government almost destroyed the engineering base of the north-west. Indeed, in that regard, the area has suffered more than any other region of Britain. Over the decade, there has been a 30 per cent. reduction in manufacturing employment—30 per cent. in the case of a region that accounts for the second largest contribution, in monetary and material terms, to the British economy. The region has been virtually destroyed as a result of the Government's policies.

We shall not win in the Division Lobbies tonight. The Government's position is clear. The tragedy is that it is British industry that will lose tonight. The losers will be the work force, the managements, people who want to invest and local authorities that want to develop a new economic outlook and a new future. Every time the Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box, our competitors in Europe and elsewhere rub their hands with glee. Every time the Government refuse to intervene, to develop a common approach to investment and training, in partnership with local authorities and with the private

sector, they give our competitors a signal that the British market, in terms of capacity and production, is available to them.

We are involved in a war in the Gulf, but there is also an economic war at home. This was set out very well by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. Unless something very dramatic happens in the next few years, unless there is a change of Government and a change of policies, we shall lose the economic war, and we shall lose the opportunities for thousands of young people. That is what Ministers sneer at. A generation of young people are being denied real job opportunities in a real economy.

The Secretary of State sneered at my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) when he presented his alternative policies. Where would he get the money? The Government are prepared to invest £1 million a day in the Gulf war—and the possibility is that that will go up to £1 billion a week. If there is a will, resources can be found. If resources are to be found to protect industry, jobs and opportunities, we need a Government with the will to provide those resources. If the present Government are not prepared to do so, let us have a general election so that a Labour Government may save British industry.

6.15 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): As a number of other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall curtail my remarks.

These debates always disappoint me. Essentially, what happens is that British industry is criticised on the one hand, and individual companies and their work forces on the other. It seems to me that that is not the way to provide British companies with the incentive they need. The manner of the moving of the motion by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was disgraceful. He used the gatling-gun approach—an enormous number of ideas presented in rapid-fire fashion. Indeed, they were not ideas; they were simply words that did not connect with one another and, in the end, did not amount to strategy. "Strategy" is a magical word which has been used by all Opposition spokesmen. So far as Opposition Members are concerned, everything is reduceable to strategy—a training strategy or an economic strategy or, as in the days when I represented industrialists in the west midlands, an industrial strategy.

Whatever industrialists in this country want, it is not a Labour Government or a whole load of strategies, one heaped upon another. That is a simple fact and if the Opposition do not understand it they ought to start speaking to a few industrialists. It is perfectly clear that they have not done so recently. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was absolutely correct to take inflation as the kernel of his argument. I speak to many industrialists and every one of them wants price stability. There is no question about that. That is why industrialists will never place their trust in the Labour party.

I looked up some facts and the situation is quite clear. The Labour party's record prior to 1979, in so far as it was a record, showed an average inflation rate of 15·5 per cent. Under the present Government the rate, at 7·9 per cent., has been just about half that. I am not satisfied with the present rate of inflation—nor are the Government—but the industrial community knows perfectly well that the Government can reduce it, whereas the Opposition could not do so in a month of Sundays. That is a simple fact.

Some hon. Members have drawn comparisons between the present downturn—I do not use the word "recession"; it is a downturn—and the situation in the period 1979-81. That is ludicrous. Comparing the period 1979-81 to the present is like comparing chalk with cheese. I well remember taking a train journey at that time between New Street station in Birmingham and Wolverhampton. What I passed through was a lunar landscape. That was the result of a number of years of policies pursued by the previous Labour Government—although, to be fair, not just that Government. On each side of that railway line there were no companies; there were just a lot of empty sheds. I repeat: it was a lunar landscape.

That has been transformed. If anyone cares to take that rail journey again he will find that the whole area between Birmingham and the black country has been rejuvenated. It was not rejuvenated in the absence of policy. It was rejuvenated in the back of the sensible fiscal, monetary and industrial policies followed by the Government during the past 10 years.

I am astonished that we have not heard as much about the Confederation of British Industry during the debate as I expected. I came armed with a quote from the chief economic adviser to the CBI in *The Times* of 2 January 1991. He knows perfectly well what the facts are, because he said:

> "There are substantial strengths in the British economy which should reassert themselves as inflation abates."

It is quite clear to me that inflation is abating. The strengths to which the CBI referred will undoubtedly assert themselves.

It is extraordinary that in a debate such as this we have heard a litany of doomsday stuff from the Opposition. They did not mention that in the United Kingdom living standards, which are a reflection of what industry is doing and achieving, have moved up in the past 10 years from eighth position in the league table of EC countries to fifth position. To hear Opposition Members speak, one would think that the opposite was true.

Of course, I am not satisfied that we have merely maintained our share of world trade in manufactures since 1983. I should have liked to see it increase. But the Opposition's record shows that they allowed that share to decrease. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State alluded to that. So progress has indeed been made.

I am also disappointed that no Opposition Member mentioned that in the United Kingdom we have some of the strongest and best companies on the globe. If I were a manager or a worker in any of those companies I should have taken great offence at the rubbish I heard from the Opposition. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should listen sometimes, because they might learn something. If they looked at the record, they would find that, of the top 500 European companies, 138 are British. To listen to that lot on the Opposition Benches, one would think that there were no British companies on the list at all. How many such companies does Germany have on the list? It has a mere 92. Some of us might have presumed from the stuff we heard from the Opposition that the figures were the other way round, but they are not.

Let us consider turnover. British companies account for 69 per cent. of the turnover of Europe's 50 top industrial companies. Why was that not mentioned? It is because the fact does not suit the Opposition's political case, which is

[Mr. James Cran]

all that we heard from Opposition Members today. Their case was not based on sense or fact because not one of them could mobilise a bit of sense or fact between them.

Another fact that was entirely missing from the scenario given by the Opposition was that the standard of competence of management is so much higher following the past 10 years of Government policy. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may harass, but that does not change the fact. Management is now far more competent than ever before. That was reflected in the Lonrho statement to shareholders which appeared again in *The Times*—one of my favourite newspapers—of 25 January 1991. *[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members would listen they would find that there was something different about management. The chairman said in that statement:

"Some economies are in recession, but change always means opportunity and Lonrho welcomes it with sharpened teeth."

That is a characteristic of most of the companies to which I have referred today and it is certainly a characteristic of most of the companies that I visit in my constituency.

I finish by merely drawing attention to a factor which has already been mentioned—inward investment. It is clear that the United Kingdom has been the number one location for inward investment in Europe. That clearly could not have been the case if the scenario put to us by the Opposition was as bad as they suggested. Foreign companies want some economic stability and they know that that is exactly what they will have from this Government. There will be no U-turns or sail trimming and that policy will continue.

I shall finish with those words to allow some of my hon. Friends an opportunity to speak. I deprecate the manner in which the Opposition introduced the motion. It was an insult to British companies, but, worse, it was an insult for the British labour force which works for those companies.

6.25 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I wish to turn the debate from intellectual abstractions such as we have just heard from the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) to what recession feels like in the regions. I speak as one who comes from the north-west—which, according to many indicators, has suffered more than any region in the past decade—from Merseyside—which is the most deprived part of the north-west—and from Knowsley, South—which is undoubtedly the most deprived part of Merseyside. I speak as one who does not believe in minimalist government but who believes in strategies. When I talk to industrialists in my part of the country, they tell me that they would prefer some economic strategy to the laissez-faire mess which they are suffering under this Government.

I, too, remember the miracle years of 1979 to 1981. I remember rusting barbed wire on perimeter fences of empty factories in the trading estates of Knowsley, South. Manufacturing investment figures are quoted as part of the vaunted economic miracle of the Government. The Government always carefully choose the year from which they date their improvements. It took until 1988 to return to the 1979 levels of investment, and the figures mask the cumulative shortfall of over £20·5 billion of industrial investment between 1983 and 1987.

The worst hit area was the north-west, which had a cumulative shortfall of £3·75 billion of industrial investment in that time. The Government could have helped with regional preferential assistance to the north-west, but they did not. Regional preferential assistance to the north-west between 1978-79 and 1989-90 fell by as much as 72·2 per cent. As recently as 1988-89, there was a reduction of £181 million.

The result was a drop in gross domestic product per head in the north-west between 1979 and 1989 of 5 per cent. in the worst hit of all regions. The result for my people was unemployment at a rate which demoralises and distorts communities. Unemployment is rising in every region. It has risen by 13,300 in the north-west since October. In the north-west, 35·5 per cent. of those registered unemployed have been out of work for over 12 months. Not only small businesses but major companies are shedding jobs.

When a company such as Ford sheds thousands of jobs, those jobs are spread over a large go-to-work area. BICC, which is presumably one of the strongest companies in the world, is from the area and was originally called Prescot Cables. When it closes a factory, it tears the heart out of the community because we do not have such a strong tradition of commuting to work in my part of the world. There are fewer cars per family there. The latest factory closure announced by BICC in Prescot means that approximately half the capacity in this country for the production of highly valuable conductive copper will be lost because of the laissez-faire policies of the Government. They could have done something about it, but they did not care.

Unemployment distorts local economies and local populations. At Euston station at tea time on any Friday, one can see the migrant labourers of Merseyside returning home on what we call the Tebbit express. Many will not come back. There is an irony. Proud Merseyside, based on immigrant labourers from Ireland, Wales and elsewhere in the 19th century—my ancestors came from Ireland—is now exporting its migrant labourers to wherever they can find menial work.

The Government boast that living standards have increased overall, but in the north-west they are only half the national average. In Knowsley, South, I could show the Minister many families whose living standards have declined the past 10 years because of the distortions in the population consequent upon the Government's economic policies. We have a high incidence of families dependent on benefits. We all know the position. The freezing of child benefit in particular has had a disproportionate effect on families in Knowsley. For those in employment, the average cost of a mortgage has risen by £93·21 over the past two years. In Knowsley, South that has a significant impact on living standards.

The people in Knowsley, South spend a higher than average proportion of their weekly income on the necessities of life. If the cost of the necessities goes up, it has an impact on living standards. Mortgage interest is one example; the poll tax is another. The community has a large number of large families with many poll tax payers per household. The poll tax bills have gone up considerably compared with rate bills. The average increase is 38 per cent.

All that feeds back into failures of shops and small businesses in an already fragile economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) referred to

the economic needs of the community. When local authorities try to service the social and economic needs, because we believe in a local government policy of industrial development locally, they are punished by the Government with the threat of capping.

I hope that I have shown that, in the regions such as Knowsley, South, which I represent, the people are crying out for a change of Government as soon as possible and for the advent of a Government with a commitment to introduce policies for regional industrial development, jobs and increased living standards.

6.33 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate. I shall try to cover the history of the last 10 years in three minutes.

The problem with a debate such as this is that it must concentrate on the immediate, but if we consider just that and not the trends of the last 10 years, we do not see the whole picture. It is important to see how we have come through the last decade, so that we may understand how we have got to this stage and how we can go on.

It is wrong for Opposition Members not to pay any regard to the changes for the good which have happened to the structure of British manufacturing over the past 10 years. Yes, there are fewer people employed, but that is a worldwide trend. We all know that that was bound to happen. Productivity has improved in many ways and investment has gone up. In my constituency, the base of manufacturing has changed since 1979. We have a greater diversity of industry since service industries have grown. That change is neither good nor bad; it is simply fact.

However, the bad times have come back. I do not believe the easy words which say that the recession is affecting only some parts of the country and not the regions. It is affecting the regions. Ministers should note what the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said. He spoke about people in manufacturing listening to the Labour party. Yes, they are. If we are to stop them listening to the Labour party, we have to move quickly.

As many of my hon. Friends have said, inflation remains the major enemy for everyone, including manufacturers. They appreciate that our policies are basically correct, but interest rates are hurting. What is also hurting is that the Government do not seem to have the same feel for manufacturing industry as they have for the City. We have time to correct that attitude. We have a Budget coming which we can make a Budget for industry.

At heart, no manufacturer seriously wants a Labour Government. Manufacturers do not want devaluation or inconsistencies in policies; they do not want the disasters of the past. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) is muttering to himself, but he cannot explain why manufacturing productivity fell by 2·5 per cent. during the time the Labour Government were in power, or how investment plummeted by 20 per cent. in three years. Manufacturers do not want those conditions back. They want a Conservative Government, but a Conservative Government who plainly believe in manufacturing industry.

Let us get the rhetoric right in the Budget. Let us find some measures within our economic strategy which do not affect the fight against inflation but which recognise the pain that manufacturers are going through and keep their faith with a Government who at heart are really for them.

6.46 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The debate is about the Government's economic failure, which has brought the country into a deepening recession. It has been an interesting debate, although it has been short. There have been some telling contributions. We have heard the experiences of hon. Members from different parts of the country and from different sectors of industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) made a convincing case for the north-west and the need to do something to help the business community which felt particularly let down by the impact of Government policies. We heard a passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who spoke about the damage being done in the Wigan travel-to-work area and the damage to the textile industry in his area. He also talked about the important role of local authorities, in partnership with industry, to help economic development. Surely that makes sense. It is not a party political point. Surely it should be accepted by local authorities of all colours if they have some wisdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) made a strong contribution in support of his constituency. I cannot say that I agree with every word, but I agree with his point about medicine from the new leader of the Conservative party being essentially the same as we have had from the party for the last 10 years.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), a neighbour of mine in the north-east, made a plea for investment in infrastructure and railways in connection with the channel tunnel. He and I are at one in support of that important project.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) reminded the House that, in his constituency, we again have the rusty barbed wire which we saw to our cost in 1979-81. Again damage is being done to local communities.

In a forthright contribution, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made a courageous comment. He said that there was a hideous squeeze on small business in that city because of Government policy and current interest rates. He also predicted that the Government would lose the general election if they stayed in a currency system which was linked to the deutschmark. That historic prediction may well be proven correct, even if for other reasons.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), also in a useful speech, drew the attention of the House to the importance of the creation of wealth in society. I can tell him that the Labour party fully supports and endorses that.

The hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), in a speech of which he cannot be proud, especially given his CBI background, accused virtually every Opposition Member of complete ignorance of our industrial community. It was a lot of nonsense, and I am not prepared to comment further. Labour Members take great pride in supporting their local industry and those who work in it.

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) emphasised the need to take a long-term view of the economy. We agree on most things connected with football, and I agree with him also on that point. However, when he said that manufacturers in the north-west did not want a Labour Government, it was clear that he could not have been talking to manufacturers even in his constituency. When I visited it recently, they emphasised the importance of having a Government who looked after industry, training, the infrastructure and the rest of it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) emphasised that the recession which the country faces is self-inflicted by a Government who, following the tax cuts of 1986-87, created rapid inflation, high interest rates and a massive deficit in the balance of payments. The recession is self-inflicted by a Government who are so obsessed with cutting public expenditure that they sit back in complacent idleness while our transport system chokes itself to a halt. The recession is self-inflicted by a Government who are so obsessed with having no regulations on training and employment that we now have virtually no training policy. The recession is self-inflicted by a Government who are so obsessed with the party line that they have killed off the production line.

The Secretary of State pointed out that the Government believed that tackling inflation was the main aim of economic policy and that inflation was a disease in this country. All the millions of mortgage payers who for the past 24 months, have had to pay rapidly increasing contributions will also agree that inflation is a disease which has been created by the Government. Mortgage holders who have had to forfeit their homes because they cannot keep up with the payments because of the interest rates will feel even more acutely that that is the case.

If tackling inflation is the Government's main aim—I do not dispute that—they cannot duck the evidence before them. Inflation is now more than double the European Community average. It was more than 10 per cent. in 1990. It has made our industry the most uncompetitive industry in Europe. What makes matters worse, the Secretary of State has said that inflation penalises the sick, the poor and the weak in society. If that is so—I am sure it is—it is an admission by the Government that the failure of their economic policies has penalised the sick, the poor and the weak sections of our community.

Time and again during the 1980s, the Government told us that inflation would be the judge and jury of their policies. If so, the verdict is that their economic policy has been a complete failure. The result is that we now not only have high inflation, but have returned to a vicious recession worse than anything since the second world war, bar the 1979-81 recession.

Time and again the Government have claimed that there has been a transformation. Indeed, the Under-Secretary of State made that point last week during Trade and Industry questions. I had little sympathy for him when he made that point as a Back Bencher, ambitious to get on to the Conservative Front Bench, and had a choice. Nevertheless, he learned the lines about the great transformation. I now have some sympathy for him. Although he still comes out with the same well worn, well rehearsed lines, the difference is that he has no choice.

When the Under-Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box, he will undoubtedly again tell us of the difficulties that the Government have faced, yet there has been a great transformation. What he will not tell us, and what the Secretary of State did not tell us either, is that about 2 million people will be out of work by the spring. They do not tell us about the 1,500 people who are losing their jobs in manufacturing every week, about the thousands of businesses that have gone to the wall because of high interest rates, about the manufacturing deficit in 1990 of £13 billion and the trade deficit of £16 billion—the fastest fall in output for 10 years—or about the reduction in manufacturing investment which is 8 per cent. down in the third quarter of 1990 compared with the same quarter in 1989. They have not told us those facts. It is clear to the whole country that there has been no transformation in our economy and that we are in another deep recession.

I understand Tory Members who think that the CBI is a bunch of whingeing faint hearts, disloyal to the point of objectivity. Nevertheless, the CBI has a view. It knows about industry. Its members are industrialists. They know what is happening at the point of production every day. The CBI's latest "Industrial Trends" clearly shows that business confidence has fallen more sharply than at any time since October 1980, that total demand has continued to fall sharply and that the largest proportion of firms since April 1981 are preparing to cut employment.

In case the Minister or the Secretary of State think that I am being selective in my evidence, I draw their attention to that other band of treacherous lefties, the chambers of commerce. The chamber of commerce survey published in the past few days found that most regions are experiencing severe recession and that it is deepening further. The difference from past recessions—in 1974-75 and again in 1979-81—is that the Government blamed a world recession for their troubles. There is no world recession in 1991. Countries such as Germany and Japan are still enjoying growth and low levels of inflation. In past recessions, the north of the country, south Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were the hardest hit by the fall in economic activity nationally.

This is a new-fashioned recession. It is not worldwide. It has not hit the north and old industries only. Of course, it has hit the north too. Our northern regions have been badly hit and damaged, particularly the textile and engineering industries and the truck sector of the motor vehicle industry. This recession has hit the whole of our community. The south has been equally badly affected. Unemployment in the south-east is more than 450,000. It rose by 117,000 between October and December. In London and the south-east, 50 per cent. of company liquidations occurred in 1990, and there was a 35 per cent. increase in business failures since 1989. New industries have been hit, such as the electronics companies in Cambridge and British Aerospace in Kingston.

The country knows that the evidence of unemployment, our trade deficit, mortgage rates, interest rates and inflation has exposed the economics of the Conservative Cabinet as ruinous, dated and out of touch. Our industrial and commercial community know that the country is in an economic mess. If truth be told, if the Government face up to the facts and are honest about the predicament of the economy, they know that there has been no transformation and that the economy is in a mess.

The Government have dug deep into the trenches of a recession that is entirely of their own making. The people

want to know how the country can be dug out. There is enormous consensus among industrialists, chambers of commerce, workers and others that we should begin to invest and plan for the needs of future generations. They believe that we should invest in roads, railways, and telecommunications. They believe that we should plan our trading needs and invest in research and development in common with other comparative economies, so that we can upgrade our technology.

Those people believe that we should make a real effort so that economic activity is fairly distributed and the country is not hamstrung by a stop-go cycle that usually starts in the south and kills off the north. This time that cycle has started in the south and has damaged the north, but it could well kill the south before it ends.

The people are asking when we shall have a Government who will help industry instead of helping themselves to industry. I believe that people will choose to support the policies and the politics contained in our motion. When it comes to the next general election, the people will back the political party that supports those policies, which can form a decent Government to serve the country in the future.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): During the entire speech of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) I was waiting to hear about Labour party policies—and we had to wait until the final two minutes. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has checked his list of priorities with the shadow Chief Secretary? I doubt it, because we have been informed that the Labour party is not in the business of peddling spending policies. The hon. Gentleman's speech gave the opposite impression.

We have had an interesting debate—a "crisis" debate, I believe the hon. Member for Edinburgh Leith (Mr. Brown) called it as he addressed all of two Labour Back Benchers. It has been a debate in which my hon. Friends have been prepared to be positive. I want to pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), who speaks from experience. I do not think it was entirely unremarkable for my hon. Friend to try to persuade the Opposition not to talk down British industry and the successful parts of our economy.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way in the limited time available. Perhaps he and his hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) would care to come to Sheffield to talk to the managing director of Barworth Flockton, which employs hundreds of men in engineering. That company survived the previous recession, but without a change in Government policy on exchange rates and interest rates, it simply will not be able to stay in business. The Government should also protect us from their free trade policies which have allowed import levies into the United States to start to kill Shardlows, which is part of United Engineering Steels, in the forging industry. Those are the facts. Beverley and Gainsborough may be protected from them, but the great skilled city of Sheffield is not.

Mr. Leigh: Gainsborough is not very far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and he should know that it is an industrial town. If the hon. Gentleman had studied the recent 3Is—Investors in Industry—survey of business men, he would discover that 80 per cent. believe that business is in a better position now to weather the current downturn in demand than it was nine years ago. I would rather take evidence from a well conducted survey of business men throughout the country than anecdotal evidence from the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) is Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, so he speaks with great knowledge. He made it clear that it is vital that we should preserve our competitive edge in Europe. That is precisely what our policies are designed to achieve.

In the short three hours that have been available to us, this debate has brought out the short-termism of the Labour party. As usual, it is unwilling to take a long-term view. To the extent that the Labour party's vision is focused, it is focused on opportunism and quick fixes. That is and always has been the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am sure that the Minister will be interested to learn that I received today a list of eight engineering firms in one small area of Ayrshire that have been in liquidation since November. Does he agree that death is perhaps the ultimate form of short-termism?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman and I were not in the House when the previous Labour Government held office, but the Opposition have always tried to pose as the friend of the manufacturing industry. When they were last able to exercise that friendship, they ensured that we had an average inflation rate of 15·5 per cent., and that manufacturing output went down. That is the result of short-termism.

Let me make it absolutely clear that no one denies that times are tough in the current economic downturn. It is necessary for times to be tough so that we can finally lick inflation. The true enemy of output is inflation. If it were to slip out of control, it would have a devastating effect on jobs, productivity and investment. All our policies are designed to lick inflation.

Let us try, if that is possible for the Opposition, to keep the debate in some perspective. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North said that I would talk about the transformation of British industry, and I shall not disappoint him. In the past 10 years, output has increased by nearly a quarter, productivity has increased by 60 per cent. and investment has increased by 25 per cent. It is a record of which to be proud. It is right to keep such matters in perspective, and we shall continue to do so.

We did not hear a great deal from the Opposition about our membership of the exchange rate mechanism. In the months leading up to our membership, they were its constant advocates. I have always been rather surprised at that, because surely such membership would prevent a Labour Government from retreating to their traditional boltholes of fiddling interest rates and devaluation. Such policies have been followed by every Labour Government since Attlee. Would they use such boltholes in the future, or would they slip out of the ERM? I do not believe that a Labour Government could keep to the disciplines of the ERM any more than an alcoholic could sip orange juice in a bar.

[Mr. Leigh]

We heard precious little about policies from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). In summary, those policies are as follows: one throws in a state investment bank, a few quangos, a few controls, a few state subsidies, a few interest rate cuts, a few tax increases and a regional policy. What does one get? An industrial soufflé that collapses at the first puff of smoke. Such are the Opposition's policies—they have not worked before and they will not work again. The Labour party has not explained how its policies would satisfy the Commission.

Our policies are based on supply side economics. Since 1979, no fewer than 42 privatisations have occurred, which have transformed the services available to customers.

We have achieved tax cuts—the lowest rate of corporation tax in the industrialised world and a tax regime for small companies which is the envy of that world. We are determined to achieve the best environment in which prosperity and enterprise can be promoted, and we shall continue with the policies that will bring that about.

If we followed the advice of the Labour party and resorted to quick fixes and opportunism, if we let inflation rip out of control, there would be disastrous consequences for British industry. We shall not do that. We shall remain committed to our policies, which are the basis of a successful and enterprising British industry, well capable of meeting the competitive challenge of the single market and the opening markets in eastern Europe. We shall remain true to our policies. We shall stick to them, and we shall win through.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 272.

Division No. 52] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael

Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on policies which have transformed economic performance and, over the last decade, achieved a faster rate of output and investment growth than in Germany, France and in Italy, the largest increase in manufacturing productivity of any major industrial country, record levels of exports, a record number of businesses, the highest ever number of people in work and an unemployment rate below the average of the European Community; welcomes the threefold increase in shareholders since 1979; and commends the resolve of Her Majesty's Government to bear down on inflation and to continue with the supply side policies which have contributed to these achievements.

Famine (Sub-Saharan Africa)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I have to inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.12 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government's famine relief efforts are totally inadequate to meet the plight of 20 million people threatened with starvation in sub-Saharan Africa; demands that the Government allocate forthwith additional resources for emergency relief; and calls on the Government to initiate a concerted international initiative to avert a devastating human disaster and to build the foundations for reconstruction and development throughout Africa.

Ever since last summer, many voices have been warning of disaster in Africa. Calls for immediate international action have multiplied, but the famine threatening 27 million people in sub-Saharan Africa continues to pass unnoticed, while the world is busy elsewhere. The international community has the resolve to fight military aggression, to fight for liberty and security in the Middle East, but that sense of responsibility and solidarity should extend across the world to the poorest countries, as well as to the oil-rich countries. It is time for an international attack on hunger and famine.

The situation in Africa is desperate. Last night, revised and terrible famine predictions were issued by the World Food Programme—27 million people in 25 countries are threatened with famine, and 3·9 million tonnes of food aid are needed. Food stocks have run out in the Sudan, and are about to run out in Ethiopia. If pledges of food are not made in the next few weeks, and delivered promptly, people will starve to death. They may not be starving on our television screens, because all the camera crews are in the Gulf, but hundreds, then thousands, and possibly hundreds of thousands of people, will die from lack of food. Indeed, relief workers are warning that this year will be even worse than 1984-85, when 1 million people died.

In western areas of the Sudan, 85 per cent. or more of the crop has failed and now water sources are drying up. Already, people are scavenging for berries. The World Food Programme estimates that 7·5 million people face food shortages. There is no time to lose. This is the second year of drought and crop failure in north-eastern Ethiopia. Some 6 million people are at risk of famine. In Liberia, up to 400,000 people are trapped in Monrovia, the capital, where food stocks are exhausted. Outside Monrovia, 1·7 million people have fled their homes and need assistance. In Angola, this is the third successive year of drought and the worst in 40 years. Some 15 years of war between the Government and UNITA have brought virtual economic collapse. Nearly 2 million people are at risk, and last October it was estimated that 11,000 people had died of hunger.

In Mozambique, one quarter of the population are affected by drought and war. An emergency appeal was launched in April and, since then, the situation has worsened dramatically. At least 2 million people need feeding, but the appeal has not been fully met. The number of people at risk is rising all the time—30,000 Somalians have fled their homes and taken refuge in Ethiopia. Other countries in the Sahel such as Mauritania and Burkino Faso have suffered drought and face food shortages. In all, 25 countries are affected.

The Gulf crisis is making the situation even worse. It has diverted the attention of western Governments, journalists and the public. The pre-Christmas oil price rise made it even more expensive to ship food in, transport it by truck on long and tortuous journeys or fly it by plane to regions cut off by fighting. In total, the World Food Programme estimates that it needs $300 million just to transport the necessary food to the Sudan. With donors providing only a fraction of the cost needed, higher transport costs mean fewer journeys and more deaths.

A bold international initiative is needed now. By now, there should be hundreds of relief workers in place and food sorties every day. Trucks and planes should be carrying loads of food to every remote and hungry region. There is no doubt that the international community has the capacity and generosity to respond. We have seen this not only in the Gulf but in eastern Europe. The European Community allocated £525 million worth of food to the Soviet Union at the first hint of food shortages there. That much would meet half the needs of Ethiopia and the Sudan.

The response to the problem in Africa has been pitiful and donors have been unbelievably slow to react. The food crisis there has been emerging since last summer. Early warning systems are in place and all the worst fears were confirmed by the December crop report issued by the Food and Agriculture Organisation exactly one month ago. Still, the international response has been almost deafening in its silence.

Emergency aid given in 1984-85 was too little and too late to save 1 million lives. This year's response has been even smaller. Can the Minister explain why so little action has been taken? The situation in the Sudan is particularly urgent, yet it is ignored. Even if the aid is allocated now, it will take months to arrive. As chair of the donor group in Khartoum, the Government have a special responsibility to initiate international action, so what exactly are they doing?

There is no doubt that the Sudanese Government's ruthlessness and intransigence hampers international relief work. But, with an effort, agencies can still reach hungry people. It has been reported that the Sudanese Government's support for Saddam Hussein has left western Governments unwilling to make that effort. Will the Minister confirm or deny those reports? Can he give an assurance that food aid will be given according to people's needs, not the Government's political stance?

The urgency of acting now simply cannot be exaggerated. However great our concern about events in the Gulf, 27 million people must surely deserve our attention, too. With a crisis on this scale, the Government's response so far—£20 million—is completely inadequate.

The Minister for Overseas Development gave an assurance in a letter to *The Independent* on 10 January that a Gulf war would in no way affect the Government's readiness to continue to provide emergency aid for famine stricken countries, and insisted that sufficient funds could be found from within the overseas aid programme of £1·6 billion. But if that is true, can anyone explain why she has apparently resorted to allocating money out of next year's budget?

When we first heard of the Minister for Overseas Development's announcement yesterday in Addis Ababa of £8·5 million of famine relief for Ethiopia, naturally we all welcomed it, although other countries desperately need

aid as well. I had every confidence that the aid would be distributed as quickly as possible and would mean the difference between life and death for many Ethiopians.

But now it has been suggested that the money is out of next year's ODA budget and will not be available until April. Nothing could be clearer proof that the Treasury appears to have refused additional funds and the ODA itself does not have the money. As the Minister for Overseas Development admitted yesterday in a written reply to me, the ODA's contingency reserve has all been used up, and only 1·5 per cent. of the humanitarian relief budget is unallocated.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs recommended in 1988 that, in exceptional emergencies, such as that in Ethiopia, the ODA budget should be increased as necessary. But perhaps the Government do not consider famine facing 27 million people an exceptional emergency. The starving in Ethiopia will have to wait until our next financial year rolls around and the starving in other countries will have to wait even longer. I warn the House that many will not survive the wait.

An emergency on such a scale deserves an exceptional response. We do not expect the Ministry of Defence to deal with the Gulf crisis from existing budgets. We should not expect the ODA to cope with a famine crisis without new money. The ODA has already taken £60 million out of the pot for developing countries to give to Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. But if this year's budget had already been spent in famine-stricken countries, would the Government have told Egypt, Jordan and Turkey to wait until April?

The £20 million of famine relief so far sounds like a lot of money until one considers how much there is to be done. I challenge anyone to say tonight that we cannot afford to do more. The £20 million allocated so far is less than the cost of just one of the Tornados lost in the Gulf war. The cost of all five Tornados lost in action, at more than £100 million, would buy enough grain to feed for one month all the 27 million people facing starvation. It is estimated that the total cost of emergency relief to see 10 million Ethiopians and Sudanese through to the next harvest is just over £1 billion—the estimated cost to the United Kingdom of the Gulf war so far.

Of course, money alone is not the answer. It must be well spent and carefully distributed. Maximum diplomatic pressure must be maintained on Governments and rebel forces to reopen or to keep open the supply routes. Every available supply route must be used. I am concerned that the £2 million-worth of non-feed assistance announced by the Minister in Addis Ababa yesterday will all be used for transport on the Ethiopian Government's side and none will go to support the cross-border route. Can the Minister give us any assurance tonight that every route is being supported?

Given the demands for food aid elsewhere in the world and the cost of transporting food, I hope that the ODA is considering buying food from other countries in Africa, such as Kenya, that have a surplus this year. Buying such surplus promotes African agriculture in one place while feeding hungry mouths in another.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I am following the gist of the hon. Lady's argument, but I find it hard to reconcile what she is saying with what the Minister said in Addis Ababa when announcing £8·75 million for immediate—immediate—food into Massawa. We all know that Massawa is in rebel hands. Therefore, the food will be shared between Government people in Asmara and the others in Eritrea. It can hardly be the case that we are denying people in Eritrea the food that they need, because part of the agreement to use Massawa as a port to bring food to the area means that it is shared between both sides, and it is immediate.

Mrs. Clwyd: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is right. I wish that the Minister for Overseas Development were here tonight and had made her statement in the House so that we could have questioned her. But the news that we have from some of the aid agencies is that they have already been told that the money will not be available until April. If the contrary is true, I expect that the Minister will say so.

Given the demands for food aid elsewhere in the world and the cost of transporting food, I hope that the ODA will obtain food from every available country in Africa. There is no point in supporting people during this year's famine if we do nothing to ensure that next year they can support themselves. After last year's drought in northern Ethiopia, many families had sold their tools and animals and eaten their seeds and were particularly vulnerable to this year's drought. They must be helped to restock next time round.

Once the emergency is over we cannot simply sit back and wait for the next one to strike. I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House and many people in Britain are asking how it is possible that famine is here again and whether emergency appeals will be made year after year. The public want to save lives now, but they want to know what can be done to prevent emergencies in future. What have we learnt since 1984 and what should we do differently? To answer that, we must look at the causes of famine.

Drought is certainly one factor. Since the 1970s, Africa's rainfall has been half the level of that in the 1950s, but not every drought causes famine and, as in Liberia and Mozambique, not every famine follows a drought. Conflict has caused much of the present crisis. Years of war have destroyed agricultural production, roads, railways and markets and have left millions of people homeless and landless. In southern Africa, conflict and destabilisation have left 1·5 million dead and 8 million homeless and £34 billion-worth of damage. Ending the conflict is a precondition for stability and prosperity. Every ounce of diplomatic energy should be invested in peace negotiations in Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Another major factor is the decline of agriculture across much of Africa. In the 1960s Africa grew more food than it needed. Now it imports 55 per cent. of its wheat. The number of hungry and undernourished people in Africa has nearly doubled since the 1970s to more than 150 million.

The weather is part of the problem, but so is the total environment. Eighty per cent. of Africa's soil is fragile and easily damaged. Half its forests have disappeared this century—70 sq km fall prey to the desert each year. Grinding poverty has left the poor with no option but to overcrop and overchop trees. Governments have paid little attention to tree planting, land terracing and local water management. The result of years of neglect is all too apparent in the Ethiopian highlands. Forests have disappeared and the best soil has eroded, and it is

[Mrs. Clwyd]

estimated that that loss of soil and nutrients is reducing Ethiopia's annual agricultural output by at least 1 million tonnes—the amount of food aid needed this year.

Revitalising the country's agriculture will require a massive shift in priorities by African Governments and by donors. It will require investment in local initiatives, by women farmers in particular, in environmental protection, local marketing and distribution, training, and new technology. Agricultural research must focus on the basic crops of life—wheat, rice, millet, maize, sorghum, roots and tubers. It must build on the farmers' existing needs and skills.

The macro-economics pursued by African Governments has squeezed agriculture through low food prices, and inadequate levels of investment must be corrected. Is agricultural investment a priority in all the British Government's policy dialogues with their African counterparts? The west has dumped its surplus food where it is not needed and has kept world prices artificially low. The European and American Governments' subsidies have have put African farming families out of work. At the same time, the richer countries of the world are pouring carbon emissions into the atmosphere and causing global warming. The consequences will hit African agriculture particularly hard.

It is a matter not just of how food is produced but of the way in which it is distributed. It is crucial that it is available to the poor at a price that they can afford. After all, there is plenty of food in the world. In 1990, cereals output reached a record, yet there is hunger on a massive scale. Five hundred million people live at a dangerous level of hunger. Last year, an estimated 51 million people died of hunger, thirst and related preventable diseases. The reason was that they were poor.

United Nations figures released two weeks ago show that last year, average incomes in Africa declined for the twelfth successive year in a row. The provision of jobs, incomes and basic social services for the poor should be not just one more objective but the objective.

It is not only the poverty of the people but the poverty of Governments that undemines food security and allows shortages to develop into famine. In Asia, where half the world's hungry live, much greater falls in food output have not led to famine, because Governments there were able to afford to invest in food stocks, distribution networks, and large public work programmes in providing incomes for the most vulnerable. They also had the foreign exchange to import food rather than wait for donors to pledge food aid.

In Africa, where a region's debt can equal its gross national product, debt servicing takes one third of all export earnings, and trade amounts to only 2 per cent. of the world's total. Governments there cannot afford to protect their own people from famine.

When International Monetary Fund resources were expanded last May to cover lending to eastern Europe, countries in arrears were told to pay up or face expulsion and a place on the international financial black list. They included Liberia, Sudan and Somalia—all of which are in the grip of famine.

Unless there is a greater reduction of multilateral debt in particular and a liberalisation of western markets, African recovery and reconstruction will be impossible. Politics as well as economics plays its part. Those who have studied the history of famines claim that there is hardly a case in which famine has occurred in an independent and democratic country that has an uncensored press. Pressure from a free press and an unbridled opposition is one way of making Governments listen to the voices of those who are suffering.

Over the past 20 years, development policies on Africa have failed to promote reconstruction and to focus on the fundamentals of soil, food, and incomes for the poor. Structural adjustment programmes have slashed Government investment, social services and imports—leaving the poor without jobs, health care, education and essential materials such as fertilisers. In the 1980s, drought and economic crisis derailed development, making sheer economic survival the top priority. The United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Professor Adediji, emphasises that we can no longer put on hold Africa's long-term development. Economic diversification, agricultural investment, health and education must be the foundations of a new era of regional growth and development—but recovery, let alone reconstruction, will be impossible unless international donors are committed to playing their part.

Over the past few weeks, there has been much talk of a revamped role for the United Nations in promoting peace and prosperity throughout the world. No continent is more in need of an international reconstruction effort than Africa. There is a need now for a partnership between the Governments and citizens of Africa and those of the west. Signs of political change are already emerging. Multi-party democracies and peace negotiations are increasing and apartheid is crumbling. There could be no better time for promoting economic revival, hand-in-hand with political and social transformation.

A former president of Nigeria described Africa in the 1980s as a continent of dereliction and decay—a continent moving backwards as the rest of the world forged ahead; the third world of the third world. The Africa of the 1990s must be different—and it can be, if its reconstruction is a genuine priority for north and south. Democracy, prosperity, peace and equity are essential to the harmony of today's interdependent world. We have realised our interdependence with eastern Europe, and the new European bank for reconstruction and development represents an imaginative response. We have long realised our interdependence also with the middle east. Why do we remain blinkered when it comes to Africa?

No continent is more deserving of an international effort under the new-found leadership of the United Nations. Poverty, hunger and a massive waste of human lives and potential ought to be the first targets for the new international community that is emerging. The Government talk every day about international co-operation and a new role for the United Nations. Are they ready to translate their words into action for the benefit of the poorest people in the poorest continent in the world?

7.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I welcome this opportunity to focus the attention of the House on the appalling food crisis that confronts sub-Saharan Africa. I will deal first with one or two points raised by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs.

Clwyd). My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development was told yesterday by World Food Programme officials in Addis Ababa that the food pipeline in Ethiopia is full for the first quarter of 1991. The 10,000 tonnes of food that was the subject of her announcement is available immediately, to go through Massawa in 1990-91. The remaining 25,000 tonnes will be provided throughout 1991, and we shall need to feed people until the harvest in October of next year.

Of the £8·75 million which was announced yesterday by my right hon. Friend, £2 million is available immediately for the non-governmental organisations—both for people in government areas and for those in rebel areas. The £1·5 million in food aid for Massawa is available now. There will be a 50:50 split of all the food for people in government and Eritrean People's Liberation Front areas. Aid worth £250,000 will be available immediately for Somali refugees in Ethiopia, and £5 million-worth of food aid will be available throughout 1991, from 1 April.

As for the surplus of food from other countries, all avenues for providing food swiftly are being explored by British NGOs and international relief agencies, and there are no restrictions on buying from other countries.

I thought that it would be helpful to give those facts at the outset. I recognise that I have not answered all the questions asked by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). She will realise that I am not the greatest expert in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on these matters. I hope that, with the leave of the House, I shall have an opportunity to say a few words at the end of the debate, when I shall be able to deal with any further matters.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I am sure that the House will be grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks in response to questions raised by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). In case there is a difference of opinion between Christian Aid and other aid organisations, and the World Food Programme, would it be possible for the Minister to suggest that, in the next few days, officials have discussions to ensure that there is a common understanding of the facts? I am sure that the Government would want to continue to respond if it turns out that there is a deficit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful suggestion, as it makes obvious sense, and I can reassure him and the House that my right hon. Friend the Minister and officials from the Overseas Development Adminstration have regular discussions with NGOs and other voluntary agencies.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the £2 million that the Minister announced today available out of this year's allocation, or will it be subtracted from next year's allocation?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It comes from the allocation which was announced yesterday—I cannot answer that question specifically now, but I shall seek the opportunity to deal with it later.

I am grateful for this debate, because it gives me a chance to state clearly how the Government view the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, and how they have responded. In my remarks, I shall restate some of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development in her statement on 19 December. I make no excuse for doing so. Of course she is sorry that she is not able to be here today to take part in this important debate, but I know that hon. Members are aware of her present mission, and I am sure that they approve of her actions.

The second reason that I welcome the debate is that, at a time when—as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said—minds are quite understandably on the Gulf, and the safety of our forces engaged in the conflict there, it is helpful that our discussion should take place and help to focus attention on other regions of the world where people are living in misery and danger, where our help is badly needed and where we are playing a major role.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister will understand that we are often asked, perhaps in simplistic terms, how the United States and Britain can spend all this money on arms, but at the same time not help Liberia, the horn of Africa and other countries. How does he answer that question?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would not wish this debate to stray beyond the areas in question. The hon. Gentleman will understand from the remarks that I am about to make that we are giving a substantial amount and that substantial sums of money have been announced recently to deal with the problems.

As I am sure the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will agree, it is important to demonstrate that, in spite of the Gulf, famine in Africa is not forgotten. It is certainly not forgotten by the British people, who are responding generously and will no doubt respond even more generously to the crisis in the horn.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Minister said that the food pipeline in Ethiopia is full for the first quarter. If that is the case, why give all the £8·5 million to Ethiopia, when the food pipeline in Sudan is nearly empty? The Minister also said that some food aid is available now, and some will be available after April. Does that mean that the £5 million will come out of next year's budget, and if so, does he admit that the Overseas Development Administration has run out of money?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall deal with those questions in my concluding remarks.

The British people have already given more than £3·5 million to the appeal launched on 8 January by the Disasters Emergency Committee, and I am sure that they will want to do more.

This year there are serious food shortages throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but it is clear that by far the greatest problem is in the Horn of Africa. There is a growing risk of tragedy in Ethiopia and Sudan, and possibly also in Somalia, on a scale even greater than that of 1984-85.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I am grateful that my hon. Friend has mentioned Somalia. However, a new situation is arising there—parts of north-west Somalia have been untouched by aid agencies for the past two years, and it is possible that the population there will face severe difficulties, especially after the exit of President Barré, and the attempt to form a new government. Perhaps some refugees will go back into the country. I do not expect him to make a cash commitment today, but would he and his colleagues consider Somalia's needs carefully and bring forward a programme as urgently as possible to meet the needs of that especially devastated country?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I assure my hon. Friend that it will be considered carefully. The situation is highly uncertain in Somalia, especially as the departure of President Barré has added to the anarchy which already exists in Mogadishu. Clearly my right hon. Friend has always said that policy throughout sub-Saharan Africa will be considered in the light of developments, and as the situation becomes clearer, I am sure that she will attend to that matter.

I am sure that hon. Members will understand if I do not give way too often, as I have already given way several times and I do not want to prevent other hon. Members from making speeches.

In 1984-85, between 5 million and 8 million people were at risk in Ethiopia, and, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, about 1 million people died. The United Nations World Food Programme now estimates that at least 20 million people are at risk of starvation through sub-Saharan Africa in the next few months—up to 14 million of them in the horn.

After the disaster of 1984-85, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee pointed out in its excellent report on famine in the horn of Africa that the underlying causes of famine were clear. They described recurrent drought, high rates of population growth, poor farming techniques, misguided, wrong or unsuitable agricultural policies, and environmental degradation. All these set the scene for a perennial threat to the adequacy of food supplies, and to the well-being of those in the affected areas.

Both 1989 and 1990 were extremely bad years. A fragile region like the horn simply cannot sustain two successive years of poor rains and crop failure, especially when the situation is aggravated by continuing civil war.

In both Ethiopia and Sudan, the parties concerned in the conflicts have, in the past, given priority to military, rather than humanitarian considerations. In Somalia, as has been said, widespread violence and disorder are making any relief effort impossible to mount at present.

In Ethiopia, nearly 6 million people face the threat of famine over the coming months. The threat is greatest in the north, and Eritrea is most at risk. Crops have failed for the second year in succession. Farmers have no reserves on which to draw. Traditional ways of coping, such as seasonal migration to the coastal areas to benefit from the coastal rains, are not possible, because of the security situation. Signs of severe food shortages are emerging: in Eritrea, the market price of grain is extremely high, and livestock sales have increased. There are similar problems in Tigray and north Wollo, as well as in other regions that are not traditional famine areas.

The position is equally grave in Sudan, where there has been a poor cereal crop for the second successive year. There are food shortages in all regions except the east, but the situation is most severe in Darfur, Kordofan and the Red sea hills area. A total of 7·5 million people are at risk.

The scale of the problem in the horn is, without doubt, greater than 1984-85, but we are better prepared now than we were then to cope with it. Since the famine of 1984, national, international and Brtitish relief agencies working in Ethiopia and Sudan have established excellent field reporting systems. To those have been added sophisticated techniques, such as satellite imagery. Together, those gave us earlier warning of the serious crop failures in 1990, and of impending food shortages in 1991.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Last year, the NGOs were aided very successfully by the disaster unit of the ODA, and a magnificent job was done in providing transport to take relief aid and food from this country to Sudan. Because of the efforts being put into other areas in the horn of Africa, the NGOs, especially Christian Aid and the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, fear that the money will run out and that food will be prevented from reaching the parts of Sudan that are not at present highlighted as a priority. Can the Minister give as an assurance—if not immediately, in his concluding remarks—that, if it is a question of money, the money will be provided by NGOs in this country, at least for the transportation of food?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall deal with that in my concluding remarks.

The improved techniques have allowed a greater lead time, which has enabled the donor community to pre-position food stocks and organise transportation to keep the food pipelines full and moving until the end of last year. Undoubtedly, that helped to minimise the mass migration that contributed so heavily to the tragedy of 1984. It has saved lives. The challenge now is to keep the food pipeline evenly stocked through to October, and to ensure that food is distributed to those who need it and for whom it was intended.

In 1991, nearly 1 million tonnes of food will be needed for Ethiopia and 1·2 million tonnes for Sudan to feed those at risk until the next harvest. About a third has been pledged so far, but, even with guarantees for all the food needed, we would still need to tackle its distribution, and that is no easy task.

In Ethiopia, the problem of food distribution is compounded by the fact that the regions hardest hit by drought are in the areas where the military conflict is most intense. Thanks to strenuous negotiations over the past year, we have achieved major improvements in the channels for transporting food to these communities.

At the end of 1989, we faced the prospect of delivering all relief supplies to Eritrea and Tigray from Sudan, which posed formidable logistical problems. Early last year, under pressure from the international community—my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development played an important part in this—Government and rebel sides agreed to open the southern line. The line is now working remarkably well: it is approaching its monthly target of 15,000 tonnes and, in all, has moved 110,000 tonnes of food. Government and rebels have recently agreed to allow trucks to distribute food off the main route, which will significantly improve direct access to those in need.

Throughout 1990, an expensive but necessary airlift was mounted to reach the vulnerable groups in the Asmara area. It has reached up to 700,000 people, and has helped to keep many alive. We have provided £450,000 towards its cost. But perhaps the most important recent breakthrough in the relief effort has been the reopening of the port of Massawa. Relief operations were greatly hampered when the EPLF took the port in February last year; negotiations to reopen it continued throughout the year, under United Nations auspices. In December, both sides agreed to accept a United Nations vessel shuttling between Dijbouti and Massawa with food shipments.

The first relief vessel arrived in Massawa on 8 January. The food has been unloaded and trucked to Asmara, and

the boat is returning for its next delivery. The opening of Massawa is a major breakthrough in the relief operation, and we shall be pressing for greater use of the Massawa route.

The machinery for relief is therefore operating reasonably well in Ethiopia, and is ready for the major relief effort that will be needed in 1991. The prospects for Sudan, however, are very much worse. The Government there have a record of economic mismanagement; the security situation is very poor, as is the Government's human rights record.

The Sudanese Government have only just acknowledged that they have a food crisis. They have hampered Operation Lifeline Sudan—the existing relief operation to the war-torn south—and there is little evidence that they will co-operate fully in the major relief effort needed for this year. They have been slow to give assurances on the distribution mechanisms to be used for relief supplies. Those are essential: without them, relief supplies simply cannot be delivered.

The British Government's response to the crisis emerging in the horn has been a major one. We have provided food and relief assistance from our aid programme, and have acted through diplomatic channels, with our European partners and others, to try to ensure that supplies get through to those at risk of starvation. Our actions have been both prompt and effective, thanks in large measure to the close working relationships we have with the main British voluntary agencies that are working in Ethiopia and Sudan.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The Minister keeps telling us, with a gravity that I am sure we all share, just how much worse the present situation is than that of 1984-85, In his concluding remarks, will he tell us the scale of the resources that have been made available this time, and how much was made available in 1984-85?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall do so if there is time—well, there will be time.

The agencies to which I have referred have a vital role to play in getting the aid to the hungry. My right hon. Friend has sent me a message from Addis Ababa specifically to ask me to pay tribute to the dedication of the British and other NGOs working in Ethiopia, and to the courage and selflessness of the staff of the United Nations agencies in Ethiopia, which has been crucial in opening up the Massawa-Asmara route. I am very happy to do so, and I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to join me.

In 1990, we made available over £28 million to Ethiopia and Sudan in food and emergency aid, including assistance for refugees. In addition, we contributed to the cost of relief aid provided by the European Community. We responded quickly to immediate needs as they arose. In the autumn, the World Food Programme launched an interim appeal for 100,000 tonnes of food for Ethiopia to cover the first quarter of 1991. We were one of the first donors to respond with 5,000 tonnes. We also gave £500,000 to help with transport. In Sudan, we provided 10,400 tonnes of food to Kordofan.

We also alerted other donors to the impending crisis. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development raised the issue at a meeting of Ministers of the European Community's development council in November. She warned that only an effort by the international community as a whole would avert a major crisis this year.

In December, we received the preliminary findings of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation on likely food needs in Ethiopia and Sudan in 1991. As my right hon. Friend reported to the House on 19 December, the assessments were bad, and she immediately made a further £5 million available to those two countries as an initial response to the new crisis.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has been in Addis Ababa. During her visit, she discussed the crisis with President Mengistu. She also met Ethiopian, British and international relief workers, who underlined the need to keep the food pipeline full and to provide more help with trucks and spares. As a result, as hon. Members know, she has announced a package worth £8·75 million. That package comprises 35,000 tonnes of food aid for 1991, which is worth £6·5 million, including the immediate shipment of food for the newest relief route through Massawa; £2 million for non-food items, including transport; and £250,000 to be provided through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the growing number of Somali refugees who are fleeing to Ethiopia from the appalling conflict in that country.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister has already said this.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I know, but I wish to state it clearly in my speech.

The new package brings to more than £46 million the total of relief aid provided to meet needs in Ethiopia in the past two years. It will not be the last in the current crisis. We are prepared to provide more emergency aid as further needs emerge.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the Minister address the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? The Government are said to have committed £20 million in relief for the people of sub-Saharan Africa since October last year. That amounts to less than £1 per starving person. On average, British taxpayers are spending £20 million a day on lost equipment and spent ammunition in the Gulf war. Is the Minister proud to be a member of a Government whose priorities seem to be weapons of war and mass destruction rather than putting food in the mouths of starving people?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman respects the democratic process. He must accept that the will of the British people is clearly to deal with the situation in the Gulf, although he disagrees with the conduct of the war. He must accept that. I must show today—I do so without shame, regret or reservation—that the Government's contribution to the crisis in the horn of Africa is substantial. If it is met by other countries that are capable of giving similar amounts, the problems will be tackled.

It is less easy to see what we can do for Sudan. We have helped in Kordofan. As part of the £5 million package announced on 19 December, we shall provide food aid and help with transport in Darfur and the Red sea hills. We are prepared to provide more help under the 1991 food aid programme, but we must have some assurances on

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

distribution. We are working very closely with international and British voluntary agencies to secure those assurances and to see what more we can sensibly do.

Britain is taking a lead in mobilising the new relief effort for the horn, but a long-term solution to the problems of the horn, as hon. Members know, depends on ending the civil wars. The drought and crop failure in Ethiopia have not been caused by civil war, but civil war has crippled the efforts to help. We have, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley urged, taken every possible step to urge all the parties in both countries to seek early peaceful solutions to their differences, and we shall continue to do more where we can.

The rest of Africa poses grave problems, and we must not overlook what is happening in other countries. In Mozambique and Angola, disaster threatens. Years of internal conflict have brought misery to millions and made refugees of thousands more. They have wrought havoc with the economies of those countries and crippled agricultural production. Poor rains have added to the problems.

Provisional figures in Mozambique show that it is likely to need 350,000 tonnes of food aid for free distribution in the coming year. Another 700,000 tonnes will be needed for sale in local markets. The cost of transport, distribution and associated relief activities is estimated at nearly $100 million.

In Angola, until recently the conflict has made it difficult even to begin calculating the extent of the need. The United Nations estimates that up to 2 million people —a fifth of the population—are at risk. Food aid requirements for the six months to the end of March have been estimated at more than 100,000 tonnes.

In response to last April's emergency appeal for Mozambique, we pledged 10,000 tonnes of food aid and £3·5 million-worth of other relief assistance. We announced a further £500,000 of food aid in December. In the same period, we pledged a total of £4 million, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for the support of refugees from Mozambique in neighbouring countries. Since 1987, we have given nearly £60 million in response to that emergency.

It has proved far more difficult to get assistance to those in need in Angola. For that reason, we warmly welcome the agreement that was reached last year by both sides to the conflict on the United Nations special relief programme for Angola. We responded promptly to the subsequent United Nations appeal, pledging £700,000 for food aid and a further £500,000 for other relief needs. We have also agreed to help to meet the cost of a team of UN relief co-ordinators. Our assistance since late 1989 totals £2·2 million. We regret the recent decision of the Government of Angola to suspend the special relief programme. I hope and believe that that is a temporary setback. We have urged the Government to reinstate it as soon as possible.

In Angola and Mozambique, we shall continue to do what we can to assist, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is considering what further help she can provide under the 1991-92 food aid programme.

Another major emergency where we are helping is in Liberia. As it attempts to recover from appalling civil strife, the international agencies have been providing considerable emergency aid. Since February last year, Britain has provided more than £2 million. We are probably the second largest contributor to this emergency. We have fully funded a relief team provided by the United Nations disaster relief organisation and the first six months of operation of a new emergency aid programme set up by the Save the Children Fund.

We have also contributed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to help with its programmes for more than 1 million Liberian refugees who have fled to surrounding countries.

I have recited many grim facts and figures, and I should like to end more positively. As I have already pointed out, peace and reconciliation are preconditions before we can hope to see an end to recurrent famine and a beginning to real improvement in the situation of those at risk. In Ethiopia, the peace process is progressing slowly. Agreement between the Government and the EPLF on the reopening of Massawa was a major step forward. It was not an easy decision for either party. Let us hope that that signals a new effort to reach a just and lasting settlement in that country.

In Angola and Mozambique, we have seen real progress in recent months towards ending the years of conflict and laying the foundations for a just and enduring peace. We welcome those developments whole-heartedly, and shall do all we can to encourage further progress. We stand ready to play our part in the task of reconstruction and rebuilding, which peace will make possible.

8.10 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): We are considering a problem of grave proportions, as both my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and the Minister recognised. I look forward to the Minister's response and he will have to be moreforthcoming and revealing than he was in his opening remarks which sorely disappointed Opposition Members.

Since last October, when there were warnings of widespread food shortages, the Government have, prior to today's announcement, come up with just under £20 million, most of which has gone to Ethiopia. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said, that totally underestimates the scale of the problem and works out at about £1 for each person facing starvation.

During the crisis in Africa in 1984-85, which received so much publicity and to which the people of Britain and the rest of the world responded so well, the Government provided aid of £36 million at today's prices. In that famine 1 million people perished. It is suggested that as many as 27 million might perish in the present famine. However, the Government have made available not much more than half the funds—at 1984-85 prices—that they made available during the last famine. That simply is not enough.

Mr. Lester: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the amount that we spent over the whole of the 1984-85 period. That was the total sum at the end of the emergency. We are now talking about initial sums at the beginning of an emergency. The two sums are not comparable.

Mr. Watson: I do not accept that. I quoted the figure for the period to October 1989.

We are approaching the end of the financial year, and the Minister has just announced that he is not aware whether the £8·7 million announced yesterday will come under this year's budget or next year's budget. It is a safe assumption, although I should be glad to be contradicted about this, that that sum will come from next year's budget. My comparison was relevant. We hope that much more will be made available.

The cost of our efforts in the Gulf is also relevant. At this time, our efforts are costing in excess of £1 billion. It has been calculated that that money could feed for the next year the 10 million Ethiopian and Sudanese people who face starvation. We must look at what is happening in terms of priorities and ask bluntly whether it is more important to spend money dropping bombs on Iraq or on feeding the people in Ethiopia and Sudan. I am concentrating on Sudan and Ethiopia, although I am aware of the problems in other countries.

A primary aim should be for our Government to provide more emergency aid, notwithstanding what they have done so far, because the present situation is special. Additional ODA funds should be made available and we must be absolutely certain what year those funds refer to. It is not good enough to say that more money is being made available unless it is clear where that money is coming from.

The United Nations should also be involved, as we are not simply talking about a United Kingdom effort. The effort should be worldwide. For the first time, there appears to be unity within the United Nations. We should use that new-found unity to promote a reconstruction effort in the horn of Africa. We should use that unity and influence to bring about ceasefires in the civil wars that have ravaged Liberia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Sudan and which have such catastrophic effects on attempts to feed the populations in those countries.

We should use the United Nations in the way that it was intended to be used when it was established. Why cannot the United Nations encourage broad-based development in economic terms? We are aware of the role played by the World bank. However, we should use the unity in the United Nations to bring together nations that can afford to contribute and which have surpluses available that the countries in sub-Saharan Africa so desperately need.

The most extreme example of need is Mozambique. Mozambique is far and away the world's most aid-dependent economy. The official development assistance given to that country accounted for 76 per cent. of its gross national product in 1989—in comparison to the 11 per cent. average for sub-Saharan Africa. That gives us an idea of the scale of the problem facing Mozambique. That country is still ravaged by civil war and refugees are still flooding both ways across its borders. At least 60 per cent. of the population of Mozambique live in what is officially described as absolute poverty. Ironically the demand for aid would increase if a peace agreement were reached, because of the development aid that would then be necessary.

The announcement by the Minister for Overseas Development in Addis Ababa today is welcome, but it is not enough simply to highlight what the United Kingdom is doing. The Government have a broader role in bringing together an international response.

So far, the international effort has been woefully inadequate. For example, the World Food Programme has estimated that 1·2 million tonnes of food are required for Sudan alone this year and yet by the middle of January only 10 per cent. of that had been pledged. With the Gulf war raging, there is no sign of that increasing dramatically. However, it must increase and the Government should be taking a lead to ensure that that happens.

The Government pledged £5 million last year, but that is not enough for Sudan. The Foreign Secretary is shuffling back and forth across Europe with a begging bowl seeking financial assistance for our efforts in the war raging in the Gulf. That may be necessary, but is it any more necessary than the need to rattle the can for those who desperately need food in Africa?

What efforts are the Government making? Are the Government and the Minister for Overseas Development going to demand that other western nations put their hands in their pockets, not just to buy bombs and planes and make up some of the billions of pounds that we are spending on the Gulf war, but to feed the starving people in sub-Saharan Africa? When the Minister replies, I invite him to tell us what efforts we are to make with our European and western colleagues in that respect.

At a time when relief agencies around the world are overstretched simply dealing with the refugee problems emanating from the Gulf—problems which are likely to get worse before they get better—it is clear that they do not have the resources, unless there are additional funds, to begin to tackle the problems.

The Minister for Overseas Development was reported as saying on 10 January that the war in the Gulf would have no effect on the amount of ODA money that will be made available. Today's announcement and the fact that there appears to be a knock-on effect into the 1991-92 budget makes it clear that, while additional funds can be found for the war in the Gulf, no attempt is being made to do the same for overseas aid, particularly for Africa.

I cannot state too strongly that I believe that special aid must be made available to deal with the problem in sub-Saharan Africa. I want to finish by quoting one of those people who face starvation. Goodness knows, he may have already died. I refer to a farmer in Adi Caieh, in southern Eritrea. Only two months ago, he told a Christian Aid programme officer:

> "My fields are as though they have been freshly planted. I have harvested dust. It rained only twice in the whole year —on 5 July in some villages and on 8 August in another. We are depending on God's will and on those who bring us food."

The Government must not only answer that desperate cry but ensure that their colleagues in the EC and in the western world do so as well.

8.19 pm

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The House is completely agreed about the desperately serious situation that faces us and about the vital importance of the United Kingdom playing a substantial part in meeting it. There are shades of difference among hon. Members, and one concerns the Gulf. It is completely understandable that everybody should feel that it is a tragedy to have to spend money on bombs when we might spend it in a more constructive way. However, if we do not stand up against the regime that is embodied by Saddam Hussein, we shall create exactly the sort of conditions that we are lamenting in Africa. There is an overwhelming priority to resist Saddam Hussein and to carry out the United Nations mandate.

[Sir Timothy Raison]

It would be a pity if that matter were to distort or muddy our important debate on what is going on in the horn of Africa and in other parts of Africa. We are all acutely aware of the irony that we are beginning the international decade for natural disaster reduction. We can see what an enormous task lies ahead of us during the decade.

We are grateful to the Opposition for the debate—it is extremely timely. It is sad that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is not present. I am sure that she would like to be with us, but we must understand the value of what she is doing. The House genuinely appreciates that she is deeply committed to solving the problems of Africa. No one could question that for one minute.

The situation is clearly becoming desperate, and it is crucial that there should be an adequate and substantial relief operation to meet it. The value of this debate is that we are able to say that clearly. We will, of course, continue to say that clearly during the months to come, but we have heard from my hon. Friend the Minister a helpful elucidation of what the Government are doing.

When I was Minister for Overseas Development, one had to bear in mind the fact that there is often a limit to the rate at which one can disburse aid. It is perfectly reasonable to say that some money is to be spent this year and some in the next financial year, and to relate that to the practicalities and logistics of what can be done. So far, I have heard nothing to suggest that the Government are handling the matter in a way that is inept or incompetent, or which shows a lack of will. Of course, it is the job of the House to keep up the pressure on the Government to make sure that they do what must be done.

The aim of the debate is to make sure that none of us —the Government, hon. Members or the public at large —forgets Africa when we are obviously preoccupied with the Gulf. The debate is therefore valuable from that point of view. It would be unforgivable to forget Africa. There are all sorts of reasons why we should not do so. Fine moral reasons dominate the debate. There are historical reaons of every kind why we should continue to be involved in Africa. In the long term, there are even reasons of self-interest. Although it cannot be said that we can see much net gain out of parts of Africa such as the horn in the short term, there is great potential in Africa, and it would be very sad if we did not do our part to try to bring out that potential. The present situation is dire, and the minds of people such as myself are bound to go back to 1984, to which comparisons have been made.

We all remember the film that was made by Michael Buerk and Mahammed Karim, which focused public consciousness on what was going on in Ethiopia in 1984. Having been to the Korem camp, where the film was shot, I shall never forget what I saw. I flew over the completely bare terrain and saw nothing at all alive—a completely uncanny experience. I saw the desperate frailty of the children, their mothers and their grandparents. I heard —or rather, did not hear—the astonishing, uneasy, total silence that pervaded the camp. Nobody had the energy to talk, laugh or anything else. One smelt the all-pervading smell of dysentery. One was aware of the shortage of cover on cold nights, and saw the tantalisingly slow-moving queues for water. It is appalling to think that all that is happening once again.

Mr. Lester: My right hon. Friend quotes a moving example. One of the lessons that we learned from that experience is to continue food aid and to keep people in their villages. Since that experience, nobody has moved into camps to be fed.

Sir Timothy Raison: The world at large learned lessons. It has already been pointed out by my hon. Friend the Minister that we have learnt important lessons, and that is all to the good.

One cannot help recalling that the sheer indestructibility of mankind lies at the heart of the response. It was noticeable in Ethiopia and the Sudan that the people who worked as hard as anybody on relief work were the Ethiopian and Sudanese doctors. It was not a matter of help from outside—there was help among the people themselves. One was very moved on many occasions by the determination on the part of the people who were suffering so much to fight to try somehow to hold things together.

I remember at the Korem camp talking to one old boy through an interpreter. He was a Copt. He was sitting down quietly reading a book. I asked him what he was reading, and he said that he was reading the Bible—the story of David and Goliath. I could not help thinking that the determination to fight evil lay at the heart of what was done. Of course, help is desperately needed today, and it is crucial that we provide it.

There are, as the hon. Lady said, three main factors in the current situation. First, there is the drought—the sheer lack of rain. Secondly, and more important in some ways, there is the dire poverty of those areas. After all, if one has money, one can buy food. The world is full of food at present. The lack of resources to obtain food is crippling those countries. Thirdly—it is the great tragedy—there are the facts of politics and civil war. Goodness knows, they were bad enough in 1984-85, when civil war raged in Ethiopia, the Sudan and many other parts of Africa. Somehow or other, that aspect seems to have got more and more desperate since then, and is intractable in the Sudan above all.

We are determined to make sure that food is made available. We can draw on our transport experience. In the 1984-85 famine, we decided that it was through the provision of transport that we could probably make our greatest contribution. The most publicised aspect was the successful Hercules operation. There are many other ways in which we tried to help the railways and the ports to handle food, and with some success. It is essential that we should make sure that we have mechanisms for ensuring that food can not only be carried to starving countries but that it can be distributed within them.

It is encouraging that, by all accounts, the quality of the co-operation that is taking place has improved compared with the early days of 1984. It took some time to set up an effective system of co-operation then. A remarkable Finn called Kurt Jansson was in charge of developing a system of co-operation in Ethiopia. I always thought that he was the man of the match in that episode. We have learnt some lessons.

The situation in the Sudan is particularly appalling. For the time being we have had to end our development programme there. The tragedy is that, in 1989, we spent

more than £30 million on aid in the Sudan. Because the Government there are so totally destructive, it is becoming almost impossible to do anything worth while.

It is hard to say what the answer is. However, we must do all we can to support the voluntary and international agencies and to keep up our own efforts. We must bring all possible political pressure to bear. Political pressure has had some beneficial results in the case of Ethiopia. As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, the Ethiopian Government have been making genuine and reasonably serious efforts to ensure that a certain amount of food gets across the line. In addition, the port of Massawa has become available. That is encouraging, but we shall have to keep the pressure up.

Somalia is another country in which the threat is very great. I do not think that anyone mourns the collapse of the Government of Siad Barré, which must have been one of the worst anywhere in Africa. Nevertheless, we must face the fact that, for a time, there may be chaos in their wake. That too, will make the problem more difficult.

We must recognise the crucial importance of this area. We have an overwhelming moral duty to try in every possible way to relieve it. Then we shall have to start thinking about the long-term prospects for more successful development than we have so far seen in these parts of Africa.

I do not have time to embark on a discussion of the different means of development. I believe that, since the 1986 United Nations conference in New York, there has been more wisdom in the African approach to development and to the approach in many other parts of the world. The Africans themselves have accepted that the economic policies that they were pursuing were likely to be disasterous—certainly they were ineffectual—and came to see the importance of markets, realistic currencies, and so on. They came to understand the importance of paying a proper price for food.

In Africa, there is now a better understanding of how the problem might be tackled. Both in the short term and in the long term, it is crucial that the Government continue to play as active a part as possible. I, together with many of my hon. Friends, will constantly remind them of their obligation.

8.32 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I begin with a word of sympathy for the Minister. He told us that he was not the greatest expert on this subject, and it is hardly unkind to say that he went on to prove it. It is not easy to take on a brief that is not one's own. Indeed, the House ought to consider that it has had the benefit of dealing with a Minister outside the Overseas Development Administration. It is no bad thing if other Ministers in the Foreign Office are aware of the concerns of hon. Members about this very important topic.

I congratulate the Opposition warmly on having chosen this subject for debate. It is very disappointing that, amid the unfortunate alarums and excursions of the Gulf war, this issue should be so severely overshadowed, particularly in the news media. I welcome very much the speech of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who opened the debate, though I cannot applaud her tactics. I agree with the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) that our job is to keep up the pressure on the Government. We ought to ask ourselves quietly whether the best means of maintaining the pressure is to table condemnatory motions. I personally should prefer exhortatory motions.

The Minister of Overseas Development, amid the excitements in the Government party, indicated her determination not only to stay at the job but to do so on a full-time basis. We know of her personal commitment to these issues. Our job is constantly to propel her into the arms of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Every time she comes out through the revolving door at the front of the Treasury we should shove her back and make sure that she stays even longer in the arms of the Chancellor.

It is unfortunate that the wording of the motion on which we shall have to vote implies that it is the Government who are responsible for feeding 20 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. We know perfectly well that it is an international responsibility. I think that I am right in saying that we in Britain are subscribing nearly one quarter of the £80 million that the European Community has given to Ethiopia. I agree that we should do more, but so should others.

It is a mistake to call for further emergency aid forthwith just a day after the Minister's announcement in Addis Ababa of a good dollop of extra aid. In spite of these complaints, we shall, with some reluctance, support the motion, with a view to keeping up the pressure on the Government. However, in future debates on aid it would be better to try to achieve a motion around which the great majority of hon. Members could rally.

Two hon. Members who are in the minority of 35 in respect of the Gulf war have referred to the costs of that war in relation to aid. According to the figures of the Ministry of Defence, the daily cost, before the war had actually started, had risen to £3·6 million and, in addition, non-recurring expenditure on equipment, transport, and so on which, by the middle of January, had amounted to £650 million. These are astronomical sums, and the expenditure will have increased since the war started. What these hon. Members have to ask themselves is whether, if the war had not happened—if this expenditure were not necessary—such sums of money would have been devoted to the solution of the problems of sub-Saharan Africa. We all know, of course, that they would not.

The answer to the question posed by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is that, while there is an international will to deal with the problem of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the political will does not yet exist, either nationally or internationally, to deal sufficiently urgently with the problems of sub-Saharan Africa. That is very regrettable, and I hope that debates such as this will do something to generate the necessary public and political will to deal with these issues.

The Minister was absolutely right in saying that the problems of sub-Saharan Africa result from a combination of matters with which man cannot really deal, such as the unfortunate repeated drought, and those matters for which mankind, unhappily, is wholly responsible, such as the civil strife that exists throughout the continent. In a peculiar way, these two factors are often interdependent.

I am very struck by the fact that the peace accord that has been achieved in Eritrea between the Government and the rebels, with the help of the United Nations, means that food convoys are getting through to that province. However, I am told that there is a danger of a lack of fuel to get the food to where it is needed. There is a severe risk that, if the convoys fail to get through, the whole fragile

[Sir David Steel]

peace will collapse. There is a relationship between the humanitarian effort to get food into these areas and the hope that, in time, there will be political stability and peace there.

In the Ogaden province, I understand, about 500,000 people are at immediate risk and distress sales of cattle are taking place, at which the sums raised are only about 10 per cent. of normal value. It is bad enough, as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said, to sell tools and equipment, but, once the cattle have been sold, these people have nothing at all. Reaching that area involves a round trip by road that takes 20 days. I am told that, at the moment, only one aircraft is committed to carrying supplies for the area. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) was right to refer to the importance of transport, in terms of the availability of vehicles and fuel and of aircraft for the remoter areas.

I am particularly pleased that the amount of aid announced by the Government yesterday, and enlarged on by the Minister today, includes a modest, but important, figure—£250,000, I think—for the Somali refugees in Ethiopia. The last time we debated these issues we had had to pull our limited number of aid workers out of Somalia altogether because of the deteriorating situation there. Like the right hon. Member for Aylesbury, I do not mourn the departure of the Government of Somalia. We wish the new President well in his efforts to restore stability quickly so that the aid programme, modest though it may be, can be started again.

Help for the refugees is important. I draw the Minister's attention to the need to give similar help to refugees from the Sudan who come into the southern part of Ethiopia. There are serious problems in providing water for those who have come across the border.

To continue on the theme of transport, Christian Aid says that there are also difficulties in getting food supplies to southern Sudan because of the costs of the operation. Similarly, in Mozambique the cost of fuel is the problem in the airlift to Nyasa province. The more that one examines the areas of conflict such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Angola, the more appropriate and timely seems the quotation:

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!"

That is more true of Africa today than any other part of the globe.

I do not wish unnecessarily to repeat points that have already been made, but the United Nations programmes need to have an element of additionality when emergencies arise. I am told that at present the United Nations World Food Programme does not have that element and that the help that has been given internationally is simply coming out of routine resources. Particularly in Africa, far more must be done by the Finance Ministers of the world in their regular meetings, to deal with debt relief. I have not checked the recent figure, but a year or two ago sub-Saharan Africa was repaying in debt exactly twice the amount that it received in official aid from the developed world. That is outrageous nonsense. Debt relief, which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) mentioned, should have far higher priority.

We should, as the Minister did, give our unstinted praise to the voluntary and professional workers in the non-governmental organisations which are helping throughout Africa. I never cease to be amazed and full of admiration for the work that they do. The large organisations such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and CAFOD are well known, but no less valuable is the work done by the smaller organisations such as the Intermediate Technology Group and indeed, the small charity Africa Now, of which I, together with hon. Members from other parties, am a sponsor. Yesterday, I happened fortuitously to have a meeting with some people from that small charity who have come back from field work in Zimbabwe and Kenya—areas which are not the most affected by the emergency. They described work that is going on in a small way to encourage self help. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley referred to the importance of such work. Self-help and particularly women's groups are set up in rural areas of Africa. Basic elementary technology is produced, such as water tanks in villages. It is amazing how much one can enhance people's basic quality of life very simply by the provision of clean water.

Simple plants have also been established to turn milk into a transportable commodity. It is called Lala milk in that part of Africa. New manually operated presses have been produced to press oil seed. All these are basic pieces of technology which do not require much maintenance and which people can operate in self help groups.

Through the Minister, I want to send the message to the Overseas Development Administration that I hope that it will continue to give generously to small organisations engaged in such valuable fundamental work, because that work is continuing and, if encouraged throughout the continent, it can bring so much hope where at present there is despair.

8.43 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I begin by declaring an interest. I am a member of the board of Christian Aid, I am on the advisory boards of CARE, and Save the Children, I work closely with Oxfam and I am also on the advisory board of the Hunger Project. I declare those interests because some of my remarks involve the non-government organisations and their work.

I agree with much of what the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said and particularly with his comment about exhortation rather than condemnation. I should have thought that there was not an atom of difference between hon. Members who follow these matters and that we all agree that we must ensure that the famine of 1984-85 does not happen again. It is wrong to invent and bring in other issues such as the Gulf war, which is bad enough but is nothing whatever to do with our scheme to deal with famine in Africa.

It is equally important that we should recognise that in our Minister for Overseas Development, we have a committed person who is out there working day and night and whose energies and efforts are supported by everyone in the House. Any suggestion that we are back-sliding, that we are not generous enough or that we are not sufficiently involved is a mistake.

I am aware, because I am often involved, of the co-operation and shared intelligence between the NGOs—which are critical to our efforts to provide humanitarian relief—and the Government. All our humanitarian aid to Ethiopia and the Sudan goes through the NGOs. Therefore, it is important that we stay onside with them. I have attended many meetings at which they

have shared their intelligence from the field and the Government have shared theirs. As a result, we have made progress together. We need one another.

I suspect that some of the criticisms made and the reasons behind this condemnatory motion are based on the fact that after my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced the £5 million of additional funds in December in response to the figures issued about the food required, many NGOs submitted schemes, not all of which have been accepted. I understand that £9 million-worth of requests were made for Ethiopia alone. Not all schemes have been worked out and not all are feasible. Some have been accepted. The additional £2 million that was announced in Addis Ababa for transportation is available immediately to fulfil other schemes. That may be the background to the debate. There is a great desire among certain NGOs to get on with the job and move ahead, but not all their requests have been met immediately.

I am committed to the belief that the British Government and any other Government who seek to operate humanitarian relief in countries where we may not necessarily support their Government's policies cannot do without our British NGOs, which are an example throughout the world for their dedication, professionalism and work. I am sure that all of us who are involved with them would agree with that.

My hon. Friend the Minister was kind enough to refer to the Select Committee report of 1988. As one who has travelled in the area affected by the famine in 1984-85 and again in every year until 1988-89, I am conscious of the reasons for the problems. There was an illusion after 1984-85 and after people's enormous generous response through Band Aid and other organisations that we could cure famine and that the matter was finished. Yet those of us who have perhaps studied the subject over a longer period know that the problem is getting worse, not better. In our conclusion to the 1988 report, we said:

"But droughts will occur again—the rains have failed or been inadequate in three of the last four years—and, with a fast-growing population, poor farming techniques, wide-spread deforestation and land degradation, the consequent famines are likely to be increasingly severe. And by each successive drought the resilience of the people and of the land is diminished. It is a spiral which, if unbroken, must result in tragedy."

That was the background in 1988, and we cannot be surprised that we now face a desperate situation in the horn of Africa.

We made recommendations in 1988 which reflected precisely what has been said in the debate today. We said that we should increase our effort to stop the conflicts and involve the United Nations, the Soviet Union and anyone else who might exert an influence on any of the warring parties in any country. We recognised conclusively that the cycle of drought and famine in northern Ethiopia will never be broken while military conflicts continue. There is an obvious reason for that.

We may want to get on with development aid and encourage Governments to invest in their own agriculture and infrastructure, but they will not do so if they are concentrating on a civil war and using their resources in that civil war instead of concentrating on the interests of their own people. The Select Committee recommended that as a result of Sudan's vulnerability to famine, it needed strategic food stockpiles. The Committee said:

"We recommend that the ODA in cooperation with other donors consider without delay how such stockpiles can be established."

Stockpiles were established, but last year they were sold for hard currency by the Sudanese Government to propagate their war.

One could make recommendations from these green Benches. We may be concerned, but, unless we can bring about a fundamental change in attitude, both to the conflict and to their internal policies, our ability to break the spiral from getting worse is severely restricted.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said, we learned a great deal from 1984-85. We have seen food distribution carried out in many areas in the horn of Africa, and we have seen the probity with which the people in the villages have been encouraged to stay in their homes. They come for their ration cards and collect food on a month-to-month basis so that they can stay at home. We learned that moving people into camps was one reason for the increase in deaths through disease and through sheer exhaustion.

We have learnt about food pipelines. My hon. Friend the Minister spelt out clearly that pledges are never complete at the beginning of a problem. They carry on month by month. It is essential that we do not have gaps and that we use all the port facilities. Many of us were disturbed, when we went to Massawa in 1984-85, to find that the port did not have the equipment to deal with the grain which was being landed in bulk; nobody had sacks to put it in. That is an example of the practicalities of ensuring that the food pipeline moves smoothly and that the food is distributed quickly and efficiently.

One central element is continued monitoring. All members of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs who are responsible for monitoring both ODA and Government policy will continue to monitor on behalf of the House, with the background of experience which we have gained over the last 10 years.

We have just recently visited Mozambique and all the front-line stations. The lesson we learned is that Mozambique is an underdeveloped country with tremendous potential. It is only the conflict which has destroyed the will and the ability of the people to grow their own food. One has only to fly over the Zambesi to see the tremendously fertile delta which could grow enough food to feed not only the population of Mozambique but half of Africa if people could only get there and start to develop it. One flies over acres of coconut trees which are completely unharvested. We must recognise that all those countries, perhaps with the exception of Sudan, have the potential to grow their own food.

Ethiopia is relatively underdeveloped. Famine affects about 10 per cent. of its population who have traditionally lived in the high grounds of Tigray and Eritrea and traditionally have divided their land between their children, thereby impoverishing the soil, but there is plenty of fertile soil in Ethiopia. Many of us who have been to Diri Dawa in the south know that there are valleys with water, which have not been developed. Those valleys have a potential for growing food. One comes back to the necessity to break the spiral and end the wars.

In regard to money, I am prepared to accept the Government's assurance that funds will be provided as needed. It is a great mistake to get into the constraint of a narrow annual budget. What matters is whether the money is there to buy the food, to fund the transport and to make

[Mr. Jim Lester]

sure that it is delivered. Whether the money is in one budget or the next is not as relevant as whether the money is there when it is most needed.

All of us on the Select Committee have said repeatedly that a budget for disaster ought not to be solely a part of the ODA's budget, which can be stretched only so far in a disaster. We have repeatedly recommended that the ODA should be able to have a contingency fund for emergencies rather than just its budget. Although we are satisfied from our investigations that money is not necessarily diverted from the ODA budget, it is certainly diverted from potential development aid in order to satisfy the immediate demands of disaster. We have always had a tremendous regard for the disaster relief system within the ODA and its ability to move quickly to assist.

No one has yet referred to the international community and where food comes from. Famine was averted in 1987-88 because food arrived and was distributed. The Soviet Union was a major contributor of food aid in that emergency. Having regard to current events in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, it is unlikely that the Soviet Union would be a major donor now. Therefore, the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organisation must ensure that the shortfall is picked up by others.

I assure the Government that the Select Committee will be keeping a close eye on developments. So will the all-party group and all hon. Members who take an interest in the subject. We are reassured that the Minister for Overseas Development is wholly committed and that the matter is being taken seriously. We are reassured by her understanding of what needs to be done in the long run if we are to break the cycle.

In 1984-85 there was a tremendous response by the public when they saw the photographs and the television coverage mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury. However, we are conscious that such a response will not be repeated continuously. There is a sense of donor fatigue affecting Governments who may say, "Not again; we have already given aid." I suspect that there is even greater donor fatigue among the general public, particularly when they see continuing civil wars.

The one message that comes from that is the definition of one's neighbour. In an interdependent and shrinking world, one's neighbour is not just the person next door in the street or in the next town; none of us would see anyone as close as that starve. In an interdependent world, one's neighbour is anyone who is hungry. I hope that that would be the response of a generous public who have already subscribed £3·5 million to the appeal of the major donors. That will be distributed.

There is a partnership between Government, the NGOs, and the public. There is an international partnership between the United Nations and the European Community. Only in that way can we fulfil our responsibilities to the poor people living on the fringes of society.

8.58 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): A consensus appears to be emerging, but I fear that I must disappoint the House because I cannot go along with it. In recent weeks I have tried to be helpful to the ODA by tabling a question or two and the replies have led me to feel much anger. This debate is an appropriate occasion to express that anger.

I have seldom been disappointed by the speeches of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), but I cannot go along with the remarks that he made tonight. I recall that he made good speeches as leader of the Liberal party and that he was one of the first to remind the British people that we were well behind in the objective of donating 0·7 per cent. of gross national product. I should have preferred to hear such a speech tonight.

Sir David Steel: I made it on 19 December.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not repeat it this evening. I think that he is mellowing in his new role of elder statesperson.

I shall refer to another knight who may have influenced the right hon. Gentleman's speech. Almost every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken in this debate has referred to the crisis in the Gulf, as one might have expected. If my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has done the House a service by pushing for this debate and by her excellent speech, followed by a similarly excellent one from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), it is that she has encouraged the House to focus on a major issue—that 27 million people are in danger of dying now.

When the House returned after the Christmas recess on 14 January and the Leader of the House in a statement about the business for that week said that there would be a debate on the Gulf, I was given the opportunity to ask a question. I pointed out that we might be having a debate of this kind. That led the distinguished sketchwriter for the *Daily Mail*—we genuinely enjoy his contributions from time to time—Colin Welch, to tell his readers that I had helped to create some confusion. He did not see the link between the problems in the Gulf and 27 million people facing death or, at least, poverty and malnutrition.

I was anxious to remove any confusion, so I wrote to the editor, Sir David English, offering to do a piece which might help to remove the confusion which I had inadvertently caused. I received a courteous reply from him and the House may be interested to hear what he said. It tells us what the press are thinking during these difficult times. Sir David said—we seem to have a lot of Sir Davids in these debates——

> "I understand the point that you make but let me tell you as a professional journalist that, at a time like this, the public are interested solely in the major event. There would be no interest in other crisis areas at this time. So I would not be interested in commissioning or publishing a piece such as you suggest. I am sorry.
>
> Yours sincerely, Sir David English".

[Interruption.] Before my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley returned to the Chamber, I said that I thought that she had done us a great service in initiating this debate.

If that is the thinking of the British press today, as Sir David indicates, it is all the more reason why we should address these issues, as our motion does in a modest way. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will feel able to support us in the Lobby.

Sir David Steel: I have said that I will.

Mr. Clarke: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's declaration that he will join us in the Division Lobby tonight.

It is clear that sub-Sahara has suffered from negative growth in recent times. Can we offer any great hope for the future? We are entitled to ask that question. According to the World bank, by the year 2000 there will be almost 250 million poor people in sub-Sahara—some 100 million more than in 1990. That contrasts with most other parts of the world, where poverty is stable or in steep decline. Therefore, this is an immensely serious issue.

We are told by the World bank that, by the end of this century, sub-Saharan Africa will account for 30 per cent. of the developing world's poor as against 16 per cent. in 1988. In some regions, only 10 per cent. of the rural population enjoy safe access to water.

In Sudan, the largest country in Africa, the life expectancy is 50 years and the GNP per capita is the price of an elegant dinner for four at some fashionable watering hole in the west end—I doubt that there are any such fashionable watering holes in that part of Sahel.

In the past decade the GNP in Sudan fell to levels well below those prevailing in the early 1970s—it is not a developing economy, it is a decomposing one. About 8 million people are now at risk, at this hour, from starvation. The famine is real, but the Sudanese Government, of course, prefer to fight their pathetic mediaeval battles than to demand help, while the west would prefer to turn its head away. It is a callous conspiracy resulting in a terrible silence—a famine with no voice, a pain that has no cry. It is a pain that leads me and my hon. Friends to the real anger that I expressed at the beginning of my speech.

Once again we are treated to one of those sounds as regular and as oddly comforting as a football roar—the familiar sound of Africa in agony. For the Sudanese people, the term "nouvelle cuisine" would mean actually finding something to eat. Children are being born in the Sahel now who will not see out the century with most of the rest of us, and for entirely preventable reasons. There is not much to show for civilisation so far, is there? We are entitled to repeat that question.

The United Nations world food programme estimates that at least 20 million people are currently under the threat of famine in Africa, perhaps many more. Despite many warnings, the west is slow to notice a famine. All the evidence suggests that that is so. We ignored the hunger in Ethiopia for three years until a British television crew filmed the famine camp in October 1984. After the famine of 1984-85, aid dollars flowed in, but agriculture received only one quarter of the total aid and less than 2 per cent. went into environmental restoration projects such as water conservation or irrigation schemes. That is not the way to solve such problems.

In 1989, the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in his introduction to the 25th anniversary review of British aid, said:

> "There have been many success stories and some failures. We and others have learned the lessons."

How on earth can we have learned those lessons when famine threatens Africa yet again, and when our response has been so pitifully slow and inadequate, yet again?

As a result of answers that I have received to recent questions to Ministers I am forced to ask why, if Ministers are aware of the lessons of the past, do we give just 14p per head to the people of Angola, 25p to the Ethiopians, 26p to the Liberians and less than £1·50 each to the people of Mozambique and Sudan?

We have heard a great deal about so-called new aid packages. We have heard mention of the Toronto terms, the Trinidad proposals and the Baker, Brady and even Major initiatives. Ministers, economists and academics continue to fly the globe going from conference to conference, meeting to meeting—they are a sort of jet-aid set.

All this seems to make little difference to the people who, year after year, continue to starve. The Government public relations team is yet again swinging into frenzied action, and self-congratulatory press release are being fired out in all directions. We are, however, entitled to examine what they mean.

Let us put into perspective what the west has done. Africa's per capita incomes have fallen for 12 successive years. Last year its external debt rose to $272 billion—more than three times the value of its total exports. Seen against these statistics, even if development aid from all sources were divided equally, every African would receive just $20. That fact should shame us all, especially when we recall that, famine apart, last year almost 530 million Africans did not get enough to eat to stay healthy.

If the Government have learnt their lessons, as we have been told they have, why has per capita aid, including emergency relief to Ethiopia, been reduced by almost a third since 1985, as published figures show? That does not sound like learning lessons to me.

I did not know whether to laugh or cry at the proud boast of the right hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), the Minister for Overseas Development, who told the House on 14 January:

> "The World bank is the leading development institution and it is at the cutting edge of change for improvement in the social and economic conditions in developing countries."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 696.]

That statement will have been met with incredulity in the Third world as it continually struggles against debt, falls in commodity prices and conditionality.

The right hon. Lady must feel like the viceroy of a distant colony. She must keep up appearances and go through the motions, using the regal language of concern. It would be churlish to suggest that she does not do that well: she does.

Meanwhile, it must be said that the right hon. Lady's portfolio will be remembered more for the politicians who have passed through it in the last decade than for the money that passed on from it. It is widely assumed that the right hon. Lady will go on to greater things; so soon another Minister will come along ready to soothe the third-world lobby in the House and elsewhere, ready to treat us as if we were some sort of dead poets' society—worthy but peripheral, few but vocal, right but ignored. These debates are a metaphor for a society systematically taught not to care—a society taught by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) not to believe in itself. So how can we believe in other societies and their potential value to the universe?

How must the Minister feel in her heart of hearts as she reflects on the fact that her portfolio has been brutally disembowelled over the past decade, deprived of influence, cash and real meaning? How many civil servants ache with pride to recall that they worked at the ODA during the

[Mr. Clarke]

Thatcherite decade? Once it was a coup to get a big job there; now it is a cul-de-sac for politicians and officials alike.

Does it matter that the sub-Sahara is hell's soap opera—that it is a scene of indifference incarnate? Yet it is the sad duty of Ministers to abseil up and down a long marginalised policy, not to mention mobilisation, priorities and determination. But to escape, they use words such as "can't" or "won't". There can be fewer jobs less worthy of telling one's grandchildren about than having been an Aid Minister during Thatcherism—except to say, "I got in and I got out."

I end on this note. Lloyd Timberlake in his extremely informative book "Famine in Africa" wrote:

"Famine grows outwards like waves from a stone thrown into a pond."

It is a haunting image. It is about life, and death itself. That should be reflected in the way in which we divide the House tonight.

9.14 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I share the frustration expressed by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) about the condition of Africa today. However, he is wrong to imply that the only or main way in which we can help to resuscitate the African scene is by the provision of aid. Unless African leaders are willing to solve their own political problems and to generate a climate that encourages economic growth and agriculture expansion, it will not be possible to achieve anything except a mitigation of the circumstances as best we can, with the humanitarian aid that we are rightly giving in the horn of Africa.

An interesting factor in our debate is the range of experience and knowledge of Africa across the Floor of the House. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) had experience there in his younger days, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) was Minister for Overseas Development and my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and many others all have experience of Africa.

I had my school holidays in the Sudan, which in those days did not experience the starvation that we see today. I happen to have been the last European district officer in Kenya. The only time I have had any fame was when President Mubarak, whom I met when I was a Minister, said to me, "Ah, I am glad to see again the last British imperialist in Africa." Then, for two and a half years I had the privilege of being Minister with responsibility of African affairs, in the early 1980s. All of us with experience of Africa have a great affection for the African people. All of us who see their experiences agonise for them. The hearts of the British people, let alone those of Members of Parliament, go out to the people of Africa.

We have had much evidence of the conditions in the horn of Africa—about 14 million people threatened with starvation, the need of 2 million tonnes of food aid, the background of desperate civil war and disputes in the Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. The questions are: what can Britain do? What can the British Government do? The debate has rightly focused on humanitarian aid to deal with the immediate situation. We have heard that, in the past two years, we have provided £46 million to the horn of Africa, and my hon. Friend the Minister has set out the scene on that. We can debate whether that is enough, but, if we want to avoid returning to this Chamber in two, three or four years' time, to have exactly the same debate all over again, we must solve these problems in the long term.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on her speech and on leading in this important debate. I am glad that she touched on some of the major longer-term issues. If we do not put our minds to them, starvation will continue. We need to do three things. First, as many hon. Members have said, we need to create a climate of political stability, which must include an element of democracy. By that, I do not mean Westminster-style democracy. I mean a system whereby the people of those countries can, by some mechanism, choose their leaders. Without that, all that one can forecast is that those who live by the sword will die by the sword, and violence will increase, as we have seen time and again in Africa.

Secondly, we must create in Africa the right environment for economic and agricultural development. Some African countries have done well in terms of agricultural development by the pursuit of sensible policies. For example, in recent years Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Malawi have done relatively well. If one examines their economic policies one can see that that success is because many of them have encouraged a good return on investment for the farmer and private ownership, and they give the incentive to those who own the land to earn a proper living. That increases agricultural production.

Thirdly, the African leaders need to show their willingness to accept external advice and help of a bilateral and multilateral nature if they are to help with the development of their countries.

How can we influence all this? If those are the three main factors that need to be dealt with in Africa by the African leaders and the African people, how can we in the west best help?

First, we in the developed world must with renewed energy, particularly at the culmination of the Gulf crisis, insist on a continuous dialogue between the developed countries and the leaders of the developing countries, through the mechanism of the United Nations and the EC and bilaterally, to see how we can discuss the best ways in which we can help them to solve their political and economic problems and obtain peaceful settlements of many of their internal problems. We are not imperialists. We cannot interfère. But we can offer our assistance and suggest ways in which we can help them if they can first help themselves.

Secondly, we should think seriously about developing the concept of a new corps of expert advisers from the developed world, willing and able to act in key positions in Africa and to give advice on practical problems, particularly economic problems, if they are invited to do so by African leaders. The United Nations can provide a good umbrella to assist that.

Lastly, the United Kingdom is well placed to play a prominent rolé in all this. We have a great deal of experience of Africa. Our voluntary bodies do a great deal. The British Council does a great deal. The Commonwealth Development Corporation does fantastically important work in terms of the economic development of those countries. Private investors can do a great deal, as can international bodies. I serve on the British committee of the United Nations International Children's Emergency

Fund, which does an important job with, for example, its immunisation campaign in Africa, in saving the lives of many millions of children in that continent.

But at the end of the day none of that can succeed unless there is a will to achieve things among African leaders and their people. If there is no will, none of this can succeed in the long term, but given that will, we must make it plain that we in the west stand ready to help in whatever practical way we can to enable them to solve their longer-term problems so that we in this Chamber never again have to debate the great tragedy of starvation in Africa.

9.22 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): This has been a useful debate on a matter of great concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Yet again, the horn of Africa is facing mass starvation and hon. Members who were in the House in 1984-85, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) was, may well have a feeling of horrified deja vu.

I welcome the summary given earlier by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State of the leading role that Britain is taking in the relief effort in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the horn of Africa. I was horrified, but not a little reassured, by the statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on 19 December last year in the House, when she catalogued the scale of the tragedy that is facing the horn of Africa, but also what Britain is doing to help, not least in mobilising action from our European partners.

It should be recorded that Britain was among the first to respond to the threat of famine when the first signs of the new crisis began to appear in autumn last year. When the Sudanese Government announced a food gap of no less than 75,000 tonnes at the end of October, it was reassuring that the Government announced on 6 November a grant of 400 tonnes of food aid for Kordofan. We have seen the practical results of that in the 5,000 tonnes from Britain that were delivered earlier this month.

Britain has also pledged 19,000 tonnes for Ethiopia to Food for Work through the World Food Programme, and a further 5,000 tonnes through CARE. Britain has also led the way in pledging food specifically for the new Massawa operation. I welcome yesterday's announcement in Addis Ababa by my right hon. Friend the Minister that £8·75 million will be made available to Ethiopia. Britain can be proud that the humanitarian aid that it has pledged to Ethiopia and Sudan since the beginning of last year totals £72 million.

I listened with growing incredulity to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), as she spoke about the need for freedom and democracy in Africa as though butter would not have melted in her mouth. I could not but agree with her sentiments, but they sit uncomfortably with the support given for decades by many Labour Members to African socialist regimes that increasingly relied on oppression and censorship to remain in power. They came increasingly to depend on the political and military intervention of the Soviet Union.

I ask right hon. and hon. Members to consider the very countries that the hon. Lady mentioned: Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Sudan. Almost every one of those countries has flirted disastrously with socialism, and not one of them is a member of the Commonwealth. Therefore, we cannot be blamed, as we usually are, for all their present problems. Nevertheless, we are here expressing our humanitarian concern, as we always do, and determining what Britain can do to help.

I agree with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley that Africa had a food surplus in 1960, but today it has a food deficit—which is a sad commentary on that unhappy continent. Almost all the countries she mentioned were administered by European powers in 1960. Today, they have under their belts 30 years of independence, but also a record of incompetence, corruption, human rights violations, armed conflicts, and inspiration by politics—and socialist politics at that.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Most people will accept that my hon. Friend makes a fair point, but it is also fair to point out that, sometimes, the Afrikaner tendency in the Tory party supports countries that have not gone for democracy. What really works is democracy, and an avoidance of state socialism. Perhaps we can all learn from events of the past, and if the right wingers in the House attacked the right-wing regimes that are acting wrongly, and the left wingers attacked the left-wing regimes, that might be better than conducting a fight across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Foulkes: Hear, hear.

Mr. Arnold: I will answer my hon. Friend by saying that two wrongs do not make a right. I am restricting my remarks to the countries that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley mentioned.

In 1960—a year mentioned by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley—Angola and Mozambique were prosperous and their people were well fed, even if they were Portuguese colonies. With the collapse of the metropolitan power, those two countries did not achieve the democracy and freedom of which the hon. Lady spoke. Instead, they gained brutal Marxist regimes, economic destruction, and civil war. The Soviet Union dabbled in those troubled waters, frequently with the approval of Labour Members. If those countries are getting anywhere today, it is only because of western support and assistance—not least, British aid and technical assistance.

Ethiopia and Somalia are the most tragic of the countries mentioned by the hon. Lady, and they concern us most. They have also been the victims of socialism, repression, Soviet adventurism and civil war. At the time of the last famine in those countries in 1984-85, aid ships had to stand off from an Ethiopian port to allow Soviet arms ships to berth and unload their expensive and deadly cargoes. Those countries' economic infrastructures were neglected and destroyed, but Britain has again provided emergency aid. I should like to know what Italy, the former metropolitan power in Somalia, is doing to help. Mention was also made of Mauritania and Burkino Faso, which are both victims of drought and desert extension. What is metropolitan France doing to help them to overcome their problems?

Liberia, which was also mentioned, has long been a quiet country in west Africa. Uniquely, it has never been a colony of Europe, but was developed by former slaves from the United States. What are the United States Government doing to take a lead in trying to sort out that troubled country?

[Mr. Arnold]

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir P. Luce), I believe that the House will continue to suffer the harrowing experience of responding to disasters of this sort. Until Africa puts its own house in order, we shall not get away from this succession of debates. African countries need freedom, free enterprise, free trade and the scope to develop their traditional economic strengths. What they do not need is socialism, which has failed in Africa just as it has failed in Europe. Nor do they need political and military adventurism. All we can do in the House is to help, advise and finance practical projects, and I am reassured to note that we are giving an excellent lead in that regard.

9.31 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Notwithstanding more recent remarks, this has been an excellent debate. I should like to thank the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) for his generous thanks to the Opposition for choosing this subject. Special credit must go to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd——[HON. MEMBERS: "Cynon Valley."] I am sorry, I shall try again—I have made that mistake many times before. Special credit must go to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd).

The debate has been notable for eloquent, powerful and knowledgeable speeches, especially from my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) and for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). It would be churlish of me if I did not mention the excellent speeches by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison), who made a moving contribution to the debate, and the wise remarks of the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir P. Luce), and the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester)—I was about to say "my hon. Friend"; sometimes in these debates we feel an affinity with him. When he declares an interest, as he did today, we know that it is a real and not a pecuniary interest.

We understand why the right hon. Lady the Minister for Overseas Development has not been here today, and we accept that the Under-Secretary of State has done his best.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have not finished yet.

Mr. Foulkes: He still has more to do and we hope that it may be a little better. It would be an understatement to say that we were disappointed with his inability to answer any of the earlier interventions, and we hope that they will be answered in his reply.

When the Opposition have put up a member of the Shadow Cabinet, as we also did in the previous debate, we consider it disgraceful that the Government have treated such an important debate in such a shabby way. It is unfortunate that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not treated the debate with the seriousness that the subject deserves.

As many hon. Members have said tonight, the situation in sub-Saharan Africa might well be termed a life-or-death fight for food. The latest accounts show that the lives of 27 million people are at risk from starvation, and not 20 million as the Government said —it is ironic that the Opposition can get more up-to-date information about the situation than the Government. More than 4 million tonnes of food are needed, as well as a huge amount of transport and the logistics necessary to distribute it effectively.

By any standards, the situation is daunting and tragic, and it fully deserves the label, so over-used in another context, of a major international crisis. I respect the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, but I would point out to him that it is not merely a minority of Opposition Members who voted in a particular way on the Gulf, who will rightly raise that comparison. It is all hon. Members who genuinely think that the sense of priorities is unfortunate when we compare that effort with that put into the Gulf. I am not deriding or condemning that effort, but the right hon. Member himself contrasted it with the effort expended on the problem that we are discussing.

As many hon. Members have pointed out, the greatest difficulty faced by the emergency relief operation could be described as the competition for attention—the battle to rouse Government and public to act, in the shadow of events in the middle east. All the words that have been spoken on so many occasions about the importance of international co-operation and the need for collective action by countries must have some relevance outside the theatre of war.

As many hon. Members have pointed out—not least the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) in his rather controversial speech—the United Kingdom is not solely responsible for feeding the 27 million who currently face starvation in sub-Saharan Africa. My hon. Friends and I believe, however, that we have a responsibility to take the lead in the international effort—to increase awareness in the European Community, the Commonwealth and the other forums in which we play such an important part. It is especially important to persuade the Japanese and the Americans to recognise their responsibility.

So far, the international response to this appalling situation has been inadequate. Much as we welcome yesterday's announcement of extra money for Ethiopia, the British Government's response has also been inadequate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West so eloquently said.

On 17 December, the Minister for Overseas Development told the House, referring to 1985:

"We shall certainly at least match what we did that year."
—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1990; Vol. 183, c. *291*.]

That would have been £36 million, not the £20 million that has already been committed, as I think the hon. Member for Broxtowe would accept. Our fair share, however, is even more: our resources represent about 6 per cent. of the gross national product of donor countries, so we could reasonably be expected to provide 6 per cent. of the amount that is needed, which would be £60 million. Whatever the criterion, we are failing to make the contribution that we should be making to meet the minimum requirements.

The suspicion remains that the money that our Government are prepared to give to help to avoid millions of deaths denotes not the size of the problem but the size of the public outcry in this country. As I have said, it has been difficult to attract very much media attention to this huge tragedy, for several reasons.

The main problem, as many hon. Members have pointed out, is the current obsession with events in the Gulf; but, as the hon. Member for Broxtowe said, another

is what might be described as compassion or donor fatigue —the feeling that, despite the effort and concern that have been expended in the past, nothing can be done to prevent famine from recurring in Africa. That is a great problem in an area where the concern and commitment of the public are crucial to the saving of lives; not just through direct action in the form of donations to voluntary organisations, but—even more important, in the Opposition's view—through galvanising Governments, especially the present Government, into action.

Although we must, honestly and forcefully, attempt to address the long-term causes of these man-made disasters, our top priority should be the provision of the emergency assistance that is so urgently and immediately required. We must not allow people to die of international neglect while we indulge—as we have done occasionally, even tonight—in a gloomy, pessimistic debate about the slim hope of our being able to deal with the long-term position.

As the right hon. Member for Aylesbury so vividly reminded us, we gave generously when, six years ago, we were shocked into compassion by the terrible scenes on television. Reports are now less prominent, but the stark fact is that this is the most serious famine ever in the horn of Africa, and more people are now dependent on food aid to survive than in 1984-85.

The response of donors so far has been too little and it may be too late. The British aid budget is not adequate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley rightly said, no genuine new money has been found. The already overstretched budget has been juggled, and money has been taken from contingency funds. If we take the money that is needed this year from next year's budget, then next year we shall be into the following year's budget, and where will that end? We must find additional resources. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said, if extra money can be found for the Gulf, it should and must be found for this emergency.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As the hon. Gentleman cheered when I intervened, perhaps rashly, on my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), does he agree that this issue was got going by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development raising it in the House on 17 December, long in advance of the Opposition choosing to use half a Supply day? Does he further agree that it would have been better if the Opposition had tabled a motion which the House could vote for, rather than one which forces a Division? It saddens many supporters of both parties outside, who take this issue seriously, to see party politics being brought in by the terms of the motion.

Mr. Foulkes: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are having the debate because of the Opposition. I respect the Minister for Overseas Development. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said, she has done her best within the constraints of being part of a Conservative Government, but that was the first statement that she has made to the House in 18 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley has repeatedly asked for statements, and many have been made on other issues.

Sir Timothy Raison: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind words. Is not the problem, particularly in the Sudan and probably Somalia, the question how, even if an unlimited amount of money were made available by the Treasury, it would be spent effectively in those countries?

Mr. Foulkes: I was hoping to go into more detail on the Sudan. I do not want to take up too much time, because the Minister was unable to answer any questions in opening the debate, so he must have at least 15 minutes to answer them in reply.

The theme of the debate has been that famine is preventable. It is a symptom of a badly run state, not an act of God. Long-term analysis must include the connection between famine and repression and conflict. As long as repression and conflict continue, there will not be an effective solution to the problems in Africa. Guerrilla wars, by their very nature, involve attacks on a country's civilian population to try to erode popular support and practical support, which means food for the rebels.

As the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) so rightly said, we must recognise that the lack of democracy and of a free flow of information are key factors, because without them there is no pressure on Governments to deal with the problems that cause famine. That was said eloquently, sensibly and sympathetically by the right hon. Member, in contrast to the arrogant and insensitive way in which it was put by the hon. Member for Gravesham. I found the intervention in his speech by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) most refreshing. If more people had accepted the spirit of that intervention, we would have had more effective contributions from both sides of the House.

At its worst, what I have described results in the current position in Sudan where the Government repress even the truth about the nature of the impending disaster. In the longer term, we must address all those issues. Political change is necessary before economic reform can be effective.

The three points made by the right hon. Member for Shoreham are worth repeating. There should be economic and political reform to enable the sub-Saharan African economies to grow to the necessary level. Secondly, conflict should be eliminated and there should be an increase in regional co-operation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central said, the United Nations must now have a more important and pivotal role to play in helping to end some of those conflicts. Finally, there should be meaningful debt relief and a real increase in development aid for donor countries.

While we are dealing with the immediate problem of famine, we must also consider a long-term solution around a political and financial negotiating table. That is the challenge for the international powers, but Britain must play a very important part.

Today we are talking about the problems of famine. We face a disaster that requires us to be less political. Emergency food relief enables people to survive. If that assists Governments whom we do not support politically, we must accept that, and I hope that the hon. Member for Gravesham will accept it as well. It is not just a matter of priorities, but of common humanity. The people need the food, not the Governments.

If only a fraction of the effort, determination and the money was devoted to solving this problem that has been devoted to mobilising the troops in the Gulf, we would have a chance of ensuring that famine does not in future stop the people of Africa.

9.46 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The issue of famine in sub-Saharan Africa has raised the gravest possible concerns on both sides of the House. As the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, (Mr. Foulkes) said, the debate has also revealed the great experience and personal knowledge of the subject that many hon. Members possess. In particular, I am aware of that experience among my colleagues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) and my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) are both experts in the subject. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) has had many years experience of the Sudan.

I can take the gibes from the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, who suggested that I was not as expert in the subject as I should be. I take those gibes in good heart and I am friendly with the hon. Gentleman on other occasions. However, it has been a challenge for me and interesting to learn about the subject and become more identified with it than I was 24 hours ago.

I want to isolate two aspects of the debate that are of general interest and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe referred. The terrible crises that we have discussed are continuing problems. We are not at the end of them, and any comparison with the amount of money that has been made available now with what was made available in 1984-85 must be seen in the context of what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has said she will be prepared, without naming figures, to provide as those tragic situations develop.

Secondly, the Government believe that we have a generous aid programme which recognises a great deal of need in the world and which we feel can be justified and sustained in argument. However, we also recognise that we cannot provide for all that on our own. Some hon. Members gave the impression that Britain should reasonably be expected to be the prime mover in many of these tragic situations which manifestly, as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said, is not a reasonable aspiration.

No one can say that we have been mean or ungenerous or have failed to recognise the problems of the Sudan, Ethiopia and the other three countries that have been mentioned. Since 1 January 1989, we have given £107 million to those countries. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) touched on that point and suggested that the ODA was a cul-de-sac for Ministers and officials alike. I hope that I can reassure him that that is not the way in which the officials and the ODA view their responsibilities; nor do I, and nor does my right hon. Friend the Minister. If I am ever privileged to hold that portfolio, I certainly shall not view it in that light.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Lest my remarks be misunderstood, I have nothing but the highest regard for those officials. I just think that they should be asked to pursue better policies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: They will be grateful for that.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the per capita rate for Angola, the Sudan and Ethiopia are so low. I shall have to move quickly if I am to answer all the questions on which I have briefed myself. I hope that hon. Members will understand. Development assistance is not allocated on the basis of per capita calculations. On the face of it, that must be a reasonable proposition. We give aid where we can and where it can be used effectively to promote economic growth, reduce poverty and promote good government. It is not wise to view aid in terms of per capita provision.

Opposition Members and my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) placed great emphasis on the fact that, in every way possible and as vociferously as possible, we must continue to press other countries to play their part. We shall press our European Community colleagues to maintain their participation as major players in relief and development work in the region. On her return, my right hon. Friend will report on her visit to Ethiopia and urge our bilateral colleagues in Europe and elsewhere to make generous provision.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister giving a commitment that there will be a statement from the right hon. Lady on her return?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am not in a position to give a commitment, but she will certainly see the *Hansard* record.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I must make progress. In fairness to the House, I have several questions to answer.

The hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) referred to Ethiopia and the sums that were announced yesterday. It was clear from what I said that £3·75 million of the £8·75 million is in this financial year. I said that the further £5 million was in the programme after 1 April next year. I therefore think that that point is clear. There is money in this financial year as well as the next.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) raised several points. She asked whether aid programme money has run out. The aid programme is managed flexibly. My right hon. Friend has assured the House that she will respond appropriately to needs. She has the ability to do so. The £5 million that was announced for food aid after 1 April next year, to which I have just referred in relation to Ethiopia, was deliberately announced as early as possible to enable relief agencies to plan for their own work and to give the World Food Programme an early indication of our firm commitment to provide food throughout 1991 as it is needed.

The hon. Lady referred also to the food pipeline in Sudan and Ethiopia. Of course, food is not the only thing that Ethiopia needs. The £2 million that has been announced will be available for non-food items such as trucks. We have also provided food aid for Sudan. As the hon. Lady knows, no condition is attached to food aid in the case of Sudan or any other country. In November 1990, 10,400 tonnes of food were pledged for Kordofan. A total of 5,000 tonnes have already arrived, and £1·3 million of the £2·5 million pledged in December by my right hon. Friend is allocated to food aid. We are discussing with the non-governmental organisations what use that should be put to. The Government of Sudan have made it clear that they do not want the NGOs to have a role in food provision. We are trying to resolve that problem, but the Sudanese Government may not let the NGOs do what they want to do and what we want to pay for. That is a major problem.

Of the £2·5 million announced in December, £1·2 million has been provided for trucks and logistical help in the delivery of food. That is a matter to which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) referred.

In reply to a point raised by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), I shall outline the difference between 1984-85 and 1990-91. In the earlier years we provided bilateral food aid and non-food emergency aid of £57 million—at prices prevailing then—over two years. Last year, we provided £30 million of equivalent aid to Ethiopia and Sudan. So far this year we have provided nearly £9 million. In all, we have provided nearly £40 million in 13 months, with 11 months still to go. As I have said, this is a continuing situation, and that is the important feature that must be well understood.

I do not have sufficient time to answer all the questions that were put to me but I should like to answer the question which was put by the right hon., Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir David Steel). It was reported from Addis Ababa yesterday that the World Food Programme took delivery of 4,800 tonnes of diesel on 21 January—enough to keep all the trucks on the southern line supplied for about three months. Another 1,000 tonnes is being bought in Djibouti for operations elsewhere in Ethiopia.

I shall shortly have to bring my remarks to a close. What is important, in the context of the problems of war, is to look to the time when peace is not beyond the horizon. The recurrent droughts affecting the horn of Africa and elsewhere are the prime cause of famine, but the effects are worsened by overgrazing, poor agricultural techniques and misguided economic policies particularly in the agricultural sector. These are problems which must be tackled in the longer term. They are major concerns in our aid programme, and we are helping with them under our technical co-operation programme.

There are signs of progress. For example, in Ethiopia the Government are moving towards more liberal, market-oriented policies, particularly in the agricultural sector. But we must continue to strive for progress and encourage others to follow our lead.

Finally we must not forget the British public. Over the years, they have given magnificently to help avert the worst effects of disasters in Africa and elsewhere in the world. I believe that they will appreciate the Government's prompt and effective response to the current food crisis facing a number of countries in Africa. The public will see our record on this for what it is. The actions of a Government committed to respond speedily and effectively.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 264.

Division No. 53] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter

Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the speed and effectiveness with which Her Majesty's Government has responded to the threat of famine in Sub-Saharan Africa through the provision of food and emergency aid; and endorses its diplomatic action to bring an end to the armed conflicts which have contributed to food shortages.

Social Services (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the Northern Ireland orders.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to move——

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. There are two orders on the Order Paper this evening which relate to Northern Ireland, one of which is small and merely makes consequential changes and the other relates to a major issue for Northern Ireland health and social services. We wish to take them together over a three-hour period. I must protest in the strongest terms, if the Government decide to carry on the business giving us only an hour and a half on a subject which should properly be contained in a Bill, so that Northern Ireland Members can have a chance to table amendments and discuss the matter properly. Is there any way in which you can extend the business of this House for three hours, Mr. Speaker so that the two orders can be taken together rather than each taken separately for one and a half hours?

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid that I have no authority to do that. I understand that the Minister was intending to propose that the orders be taken together. If the House does not wish that to happen, they must be taken separately. I remind the House that an hour and a half would be given to each order. If such matters could be sorted out through the usual channels before we got to the debate, it would be much easier.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to delay proceedings, but as the second order, granted, is rather narrow, but is consequential upon the major order, would it not be possible to refer to some of the contents of the major order because of the consequential amendments thereto?

Mr. Speaker: The second order is confined to a narrow matter. It is up to the House to decide. Perhaps the Minister should propose that the orders be taken together, and then I shall consider the feeling of the House.

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Mr. William Ross: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Since the debate will last for one hour and a half only, and since the Minister knows all about the order and it is evident to the rest of the House exactly what has been done, can we have an assurance from the Minister that he will restrict his comments to five minutes so that those hon. Members representing Northern Ireland have more time to state their case?

Mr. Speaker: That is not within my power either. We are now taking time from the one and a half hours available. The more points of order we have, the less time there will be for the debate. The clocks have started.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what you have said, but you will remember that on Thursday I asked the Leader of the House to make arrangements so that the debate was not curtailed to an hour and a half. We are

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

about to debate a major piece of legislation and it is scandalous that the Government, knowing that the second order is consequential and has little in it, did not consent to my request. The reason given for that was that the Government believed the debate would not last for three hours. They should put that to the test as they will discover that there is enough in the first order for the debate to last right through a parliamentary Session and beyond.

Mr. Hanley: I beg to move,

That the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

It might be for the convenience of the House if the Northern Ireland consequential amendments order, a draft of which was laid before the House on 22 January and which has been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, is dealt with at the same time.

Mr. Speaker: Is that for the convenience of the House?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does this mean that the House will not divide in an hour and a half?

Mr. Speaker: If the House wants to divide, it will divide. I sense the mood of the House that it is not for its convenience that the orders be taken together. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aye."] Order. The Chair will need the unanimous consent of the House for the orders to be taken together, and I sense that that is not forthcoming.

Mr. Hanley: It seems that it is not for the convenience of the House for the orders to be taken together and, therefore, I shall speak about the order that comes first, the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order. I assure right hon. and hon. Members that I shall deal with the matter as briefly as the important issue allows.

This is an important issue and I recognise the concern that has been expressed. However, I am sure that hon. Members will recognise that this important issue has been dealt with after considerable consultation. We have had consultations with at least two hon. Members and some 17 district councils. The matter has been carefully considered and, following consultation with certain hon. Members, changes were made to the order. I therefore believe that democracy has been served.

The order implements the policies that were described in the White Paper "Working for Patients" and in the Northern Ireland policy paper on community care "People First." In broad terms, the order does for Northern Ireland what the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 has achieved for the rest of the United Kingdom. As such, it is the most significant piece of legislation involving health and personal social services in the Province since 1972. Therefore, I readily accept the importance of the order.

Although the order makes a number of important changes, its main purpose is to build upon the strengths of the existing system and to give the highly trained and dedicated people working in the services greater freedom to use their skills to the benefit of patients and clients. It will do this by introducing a new flexibility into the system and by delegating responsibility as much as possible to those directly involved in providing care.

At the heart of the order are the provisions which will allow the Department to redefine the responsibility of health and social services boards. This power will be used to direct that the primary functions of boards should include providing directly, or through contracts, services for their resident populations. This change is central to the Government's reforms and will allow the development of a system of contracting through which boards as commissioners of services will secure them from a range of providers. In future, the primary responsibility of boards will be to identify and to make arrangements through contracts to secure access to a comprehensive range of good quality, value for money services which will best meet the needs of their resident populations.

To facilitate all this, the order makes provision for health and social services contracts. HSS contracts will be analogous to NHS contracts in Great Britain. They will enable boards and other health and social services bodies to make arrangements with each other for the provision of services to agreed standards in return for funding. They will allow much greater flexibility in the provision of services and they will remove one of the major problems in the present system.

At present, a hospital that improves efficiency and effectiveness and attracts more patients can find itself in financial difficulty because budgets have been set on an historic basis; in other words, they become almost too popular. In future, money will follow patients and successful hospitals will be resourced according to the work that they actually do—that seems very much more fair to me.

It must be stressed that the new HSS contracts will not be enforceable by the courts and they will not be the subject of litigation. That may puzzle some hon. Members, but it is because they are internal arrangements. Nevertheless, the contracts will be binding on the parties, which will have recourse to my Department for arbitration.

The order also provides for the reconstruction of the health and social services boards themselves. It will allow the Department to appoint smaller, management-oriented boards comprising an equal number of executive and non-executive members and a non-executive chairman. At present, the boards, as most people would agree, are unwieldy bodies comprising up to and more than 30 members. In future, therefore, there will be no more than 12 members plus the non-executive chairman. Boards' membership will reflect the skill and experience required for the efficient and effective planning and delivery of health and personal social services.

In the case of the Eastern board, the largest, one of the non-executive members will be drawn from the Queen's university medical school. There will no longer be places on the boards specifically for district council nominees or for representatives of professions and trades unions. It is felt that because members will no longer be tempted to represent narrow sectional interests, boards might be better placed to provide the strong, strategic leadership needed to plan for and obtain the optimum range of services for their local population.

I am conscious that the new, smaller health and social services boards will require strong advice from the public and from users of the services. To this end, the order

requires the Department to set up four mirroring health and social services councils, one relating to each board. These will replace the existing structure of 16 district committees.

During consultation on the proposed order, our plans for health and social services councils, I admit, attracted the most attention—and some criticism. After careful consideration of the comments that we received both on the proposed order and during earlier consultation on the same issue, I remain convinced that each board in its role as a commissioner of services will be best served by having a single, coherent source of strong public and consumer advice.

I do not accept that links with local communities will be lost. On the contrary, it will be the duty of individual councils to ensure that they retain strong ties with users and the public. They will be able to do this through publicising their activities and providing the necessary means of communication. They will also be able to set up committees and sub-committees, which can have either a geographical or a subject base and they will be able to co-opt people. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who considerately came to see me last week to discuss these issues with me. I am grateful to him for that.

I am still not convinced of the need for an advisory tier at regional level. The new health and social services councils will be able to co-operate with one another—should they wish, and I hope that they will—and they will be free to form associations if they wish. Because I want our position on this important issue to be beyond doubt, it has even been included in the order, with a specific provision enabling councils to collaborate freely with each other. The initiative for such collaboration must come from the councils themselves. I am committed to ensuring that they have the necessary resources to develop that association—again, if they wish.

I have made another minor amendment to the order. During consultation, we were reminded of the importance of ensuring that the new councils get into their stride as quickly as possible. Therefore, I have decided that, initially at least, the Department should appoint the chairman of each council. However, it is our firm intention that in future, chairmen shall be elected by the members, and this will not be prejudiced by any of the regulations.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): It is all very fine to say, "Live, horse and you'll get grass," or in other words, that one day we can appoint the chairmen of our health and social services councils. Those who have served on the existing boards fear that the standards will have been set at the behest, and under the guidance, of chairmen appointed by the Minister and that the wrong standards will be set by the time we get our hands on the health and social services councils. By then, their whole method of operation will have been guided and they will have been spoilt by ministerial and departmental interference.

Mr. Hanley: I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman could think such a thing of me or the Department. I am sure that he recognises that we take great care in appointing chairmen of many boards throughout the Province. In this case, the chairmen will be acting within fairly rigid guidelines. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will remember that 40 per cent. of the members of the council will be the result of district councils nominations, 30 per cent. will come from voluntary bodies and a further 30 per cent. will be appointed by the Department from those who are representative of the community. A great deal of guidance is given to the chairmen to ensure that the councils are fully representative. If they are not, the Department will be the first to complain.

The creation of health and social services trusts was another cause for concern. These bodies are a practical expression of the Government's determination to delegate responsibility to those directly involved in the care of patients and clients. I regret that a great deal of nonsense, some of it deliberate, has been talked and written about self-governing hospitals. I hasten to add that it has not come from right hon. and hon. Members. I should like to clarify what these new bodies imply.

First, I must stress that hospitals or facilities that opt for self-governing status will remain firmly within the health and personal social services structure of Northern Ireland. There is no opting out of the NHS. To say so is wrong and wicked.

The freedom that trusts will be given is the freedom to manage and for this reason, they will be outside the direct managment control of health and social services boards. Their freedoms will include an ability to create their own management structure, to determine the terms and conditions of staff, to borrow money within certain limits and to acquire, own and dispose of assets in a way that ensures that the most effective use is made of them.

But despite their managerial freedom, trusts will not be able to act in ways which might be detrimental to the health service. For example, they will be required to participate fully in medical and other education and research; there will be powers to ensure that they continue to provide services which must be available locally and the Department will be able to step in if there is evidence that the freedoms are being abused. However, in practical terms the main control will be not departmental diktat but the fact that the success of self-governing hospitals will depend on their ability to meet the needs of health boards, which will be the main purchasers of the services that they provide. There will be no virtue in trusts concentrating exclusively on high-cost, high-turnover services, as some have suggested. Instead, they will have every incentive to provide the wide range of services that boards require.

Trust status is voluntary, but hospitals and services which aspire to it will need to meet strict criteria. They will need to demonstrate that they have the management ability, professional involvement and financial capacity to do the job. Most importantly, they will need to demonstrate to my satisfaction that genuine benefits and improved quality of service to patients and clients will flow from the trust status.

The order will also enable certain larger general medical practitioners to opt to have their own practice fund. That will allow them to buy services on behalf of their patients, including a defined range of services direct from hospitals. The scheme will be entirely voluntary, and practices that have joined will be free to leave at any time.

The funds will be set at a level that will ensure that patients get the services they require. As an additional safeguard, there will be an upper limit of £5,000 on the cost to a practice fund of hospital treatment for an individual patient in any one year. Any reasonable excess will be met by the health board. Fund-holding general practitioners

[Mr. Hanley]

should have no good reason, as some have suggested, for keeping certain patients off their lists. If the patients are expensive, the funds will be there.

Complementary to that provision, the order will also enable health and social services boards to give all general medical practices that are not fund-holding practices an indicative prescribing amount. The aim is to make GPs more aware of their prescribing practices and to eliminate wasteful prescribing. The scheme will be administered in such a way as to ensure that patients will always get the drugs they need. Furthermore, indicative amounts themselves will be adjusted where necessary to take account of patients with special needs for medication. Many GPs will welcome the guidance that the indicative scheme will give them.

During consultation on the draft order, considerable media attention was given to the proposed power to restrict the overall number of general medical practitioners in Northern Ireland. That will only bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom. There is certainly no intention to use the power to ration GPs as some have suggested.

The power that we intend to take is a reserve power. If at some future date there were to be a disproportionate growth in the number of doctors entering general practice, the Department would be able to make regulations limiting the number of GPs entering the list. In the meantime, boards already exercise control over the distribution of GPs, and that should be sufficient for the foreseeable future. I see no danger in that provision.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister acknowledge that young men and women seeking training positions in Northen Ireland are already restricted in a way which is not the case in England and, as a result, they come to England for training? We also have the problem of graduates from universities in the Republic of Ireland coming in that roundabout way. Therefore, how can the Minister say that the measure is bringing us into line with England?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that Northern Ireland has an enviable record in the training of doctors. It has a superb record, of which we can all be proud. But I was referring to the fact that the proposed power to restrict the overall number is exactly the same as that which applies here. There is nothing new about the power. It is merely a reserve power that could be used in future if limits are necessary. At the moment I do not anticipate that the power will be used within the next few years or even longer. The measure merely brings Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Right hon. and hon. Members will agree that community care provisions are among the most important, but the measure contains only a small number to achieve the Government's national policy objectives for developing and improving care services. Since local government reorganisation in 1973, there has been in Northern Ireland a fully integrated structure for the delivery of health and personal social services by the four boards—so there is no need to make new and complicated special arrangements for co-operation, communication and joint planning between the health service and the social services. There is no need either to make a separate provision to require boards to undertake duties such as assessing care needs or establishing complaints procedures. Unlike local authorities in Great Britain, the four Northern Ireland boards are agents of the Department, which already has wide powers of delegation and direction.

When implemented, the new provisions will significantly enhance the boards' role in developing and funding community care services. Their role will change from being primarily the direct providers of some community care services to that of being the orchestrators of all such services, and they will become the holders of community care budgets. A framework will be created, within which boards will assume direct responsibility for assessing individuals' total health and social care needs, and for strengthening co-operation between themselves and other relevant public, voluntary, and private organisations.

I am conscious of the need to be brief. I will listen carefully to the speeches that follow, and I will limit my winding up speech to as little time as may be necessary to answer the points that are made.

As in the rest of the United Kingdom, the founding principles of the NHS are the firm base for our proposals for the future provision of a comprehensive service, funded primarily from general taxation. The draft order ensures that those guiding principles will remain the bedrock for health and personal social services well into the next century. I commend the order to the House.

10.30 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I congratulate the Minister on his first proper speech at the Dispatch Box. He commended himself to the House during Question Time some weeks ago, and I feel sure that the House has again been impressed with the manner of his delivery—if not by the content of his speech.

I thought it strange that the Minister spent so long dwelling on the bureaucratic changes that the order will make to health services in the Province, rather than on the realities and on the problems facing the people who want to use those services. There is no doubt that the new structures will remain fundamentally non-democratic. They neither respond to, nor show any responsibility towards, those who work in the health service or who make use of it. I wish that the Minister had spent more time discussing the realities of health provision, instead of reciting Government dogma.

Despite increased expenditure in past years, there is still massive underfunding of the Province's health service, which in recent times has led to large-scale bed and ward closures and to an increasing number of seven-day wards being downgraded to five-day wards. For example, the number of acute beds in Northern Ireland has been reduced to the third worst in the whole of the United Kingdom. In the Eastern health board there is a £8 million maintenance backlog, equivalent to a full year's funding, and the board recently announced further cuts of £2 million as it attempts, on Government orders, to balance its books for this year.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the hospital beds which are now being closed by the Government were created under the former Ulster Unionist Government?

Mr. Jim Marshall: I have no reason to doubt that what the hon. Gentleman says is true, and I therefore verify his assertion.

The Eastern board has recently announced further cuts of £2 million in its attempts to balance its books for this financial year. Finally, there has been no remedial work, including painting, on residential homes in the Province for the past five years. That is the reality of the health service in the Province. What is the Government's response? From what the Minister said one would have expected him to announce that increased financial resources would be made available. However, that was not his response—it was that the health service will be handed over to the marketplace, and thereafter everything will be for the better.

Mr. Hanley: I do not want to take up too much time, or other hon. Members may not be able to take part in the debate. However, yet again, the hon. Gentleman seems to be looking after beds rather than patients. He mentioned the Eastern health board. The latest booklet describing the statistical data for that board shows that in the past nine years admissions have increased from 129,000 to 140,000; the number of out-patients has increased from 701,000 to 748,000; the number of major operations has gone up from 21,000 to 23,000; the total of operations has increased from 116,000 to 138,000; and accident and emergency attendances have risen from 331,000 to 358,000. It seems that patients are more important to the Eastern health board than mere beds.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Gentleman knows that I said, at the outset, that there had been increases in funding in the health service in the Province. I have not sought to deny that. The only point that I am seeking to make—the Minister may think that I am taking too long about it—is that, despite those increased resources, the level of health care and social deprivation in the Province dictate higher levels of funding than the Government are prepared to provide. The specific examples that I have cited represent the reality in the Province. Two of the examples that I quoted refer specifically to problems faced by the Eastern board.

The Government's response to the problem is to introduce the concept of the marketplace, not merely throughout Great Britain, but into the Province. Throughout the various stages of discussions on other Bills, we have made no secret of the fact that we believe that it is nonsense in Great Britain, and will prove to be nonsense in the Province.

While experiments do not always prove beyond peradventure what is likely to happen, I am sure that even the Minister will be aware that the experiment recently carried out by the East Anglian regional health authority showed that disaster, rather than paradise, lies ahead for the health service under this new concept. That will prove to be even more the case in Northern Ireland.

How can one have an internal market in such a small area, and in an area where one group of hospitals—the Royal—has such a dominant role in the provision of health service facilities?

Health care is unlikely to improve as a consequence of the proposed changes, but one small, select group has already benefited: that group of the elect who have responded to recent advertisements for middle and senior management jobs in the new boards. I hesitate to use the word "inflated", but the salaries are certainly commensurate with the duties that they will perform—duties which have not yet been detailed in job specifications.

Despite the differences that may exist between Government and Opposition over funding, I think that both agree on the need for increased resources in the Province because of the scale of social deprivation there—despite the lack of evidence provided by the 1981 census. While I recognise the inadequacies of that census, given the relatively poor returns in the Province, I think that we all agree that there is more social deprivation there than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Will the Government consider reducing the Jarman index threshold from 30 to 16 to take account of that factor? That would provide only a rough-and-ready yardstick, but it would constitute a recognition of the special problems in the Province.

I mentioned the regionally funded medical services to the Minister before the debate began. The Government have accepted that some specialty services will still need central funding. Let me ask the Minister three specific questions. How many applications for treatment have been received so far? Which specialties are involved? How many applications have, to the Minister's knowledge, been successful?

It will come as no surprise to the House that my party is still opposed to the principle of opting out; but we believe that, if it is to remain, it should be tested by ballot. Two groups should be balloted: the staff of the hospital concerned and the local community. That would, at least, gauge the opinions of both providers and recipients of the service. I am sorry to learn that the Royal group of hospitals has decided not to hold those two ballots. The group has indicated a desire to opt out, but I gather that that feeling is limited to members of the board and, perhaps, the Department headed by the Minister; it is widely known that the majority of the staff, including consultants, are opposed to the principle.

As I said earlier, the position of the Royal group in the Province highlights the problems associated with the internal market system in Northern Ireland. Nearly all the specialties are based there; far from creating the competitive atmosphere described by the Minister, and far from enhancing the availability of choice, the group will probably become a monopoly in many respects, and that is not likely to increase the provision of health care according to the free-market principles enunciated by the Minister.

Evidence from the Province shows that competitive tendering has led to a decline in hospital standards. Contractors estimate that it is possible to clean toilets and wash basins in 0·39 seconds. It is not surprising that standards have declined under that regime. Figures show that any savings that may have accrued from competitive tendering have been outweighed by the increased costs arising form cross-infection. That is typical of the Government's Alice-in-Wonderland attitude to the application of market principles in the health service, but perhaps I am being a little unkind to Alice.

All sections of the community have welcomed the community care provisions not only of the order but of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. It has been said time and again not only by politicians but by interested organisations that unless these changes are accompanied by substantial increases in finance, their aims will be laudable but unattainable. The Government seem reluctant to commit themselves to enhanced funding.

[Mr. Marshall]

The Minister will agree, despite the point that he made about the close relationship between health and social services, that social services in the Province have always been underfunded. Compared with other regions of the United Kingdom, the Province's social services have been underfunded. Across-the-board cuts in expenditure by health boards have hit social services budgets particularly hard. The Minister will know that that has forced several boards to put the cleaning of health and day centres out to private contract—that could not happen in the remainder of the United Kingdom—with an inevitable decline in standards.

The Minister will be aware that the arm's-length registration and inspection units are supposed to provide a complete registration and inspection service for public, private and voluntary sector homes. Will the Government insist that the criteria that they adopt when they carry out their inspections are published? In England and Wales, the criteria must be published, whereas there is no such need in Northern Ireland and the boards have shown themselves to be extremely reluctant to publish them.

The Minister must realise that the additional powers being conferred on those units will lead to increased expenditure. The local authority in Leicestershire is facing increased expenditure of £150,000 per annum, but no increased finance is being made available there or in the Province to meet that expenditure. Will the Minister undertake to consider the problem and, if possible, ensure that those units are not financed from within the existing budget? If they are, the level of service will be reduced. Will the Minister consider that and give at least some commitment that any additional expenditure involved in carrying out the work of the units will be financed by increased resources rather than from the existing budgets?

It will come as no surprise to right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies in the Province that the home help service has been a continuing major source of discontent there. Despite Government claims to the contrary, the home help service has been dramatically and drastically reduced in recent years. As far as I can see, the future is even bleaker. The boards' business plans reveal the intentions for the home help service. Following the implementation of this legislation, the directly managed home help service will be available only to the most acute cases.

Mr. Hanley: For clarification, in Northern Ireland at the moment there are 15·8 home helps per thousand of the population, compared with 7·8 in England. That is a remarkable record.

Mr. Marshall: I am grateful for that further information. It just so happens that the Minister's figures do not invalidate my criticism that the home help service has been dramatically and drastically reduced over the past few years. *[Interruption.]* As a former Whip, I realise that there are time when one needs to discuss things with one's silent colleagues, but, as I listened to the Minister in silence, perhaps he will listen to me for a few seconds in silence.

In response to the Minister's statistics, I will quote the example of an elderly person who was assessed five years ago as needing six hours a week home help provision. That person may now be receiving only one hour a week in spite of their obvious increasing frailty. The Minister's figures are meaningless in terms of the service that is actually provided. I am sure that hon. Members from the Province can verify that the service provided to individuals has declined seriously, particularly over the past five years.

As I said, following the implementation of this legislation, the directly managed home help service will be available only to the most acute cases. The health boards do not specify in their plans what "acute cases" are likely to be. We have no idea how many people are likely to be relieved of the service, nor are we aware of other consequences. If the Minister can give us some idea of what is meant by "most acute cases", that will be helpful.

The remainder of the home help service would be provided by the voluntary sector and, despite the valiant work that it is carrying out in the Province, it cannot pick up the slack released by the public sector.

Mr. William Ross: Surely the Minister's figures are meaningless, because it is not the number of home helps per thousand of the population that matters, but the number of hours that each home help spends with each individual case. The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) was right to state that that time has been greatly reduced.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Gentleman has reinforced my point. I referred to a specific example in which the number of hours of home help provision per week have been reduced from six to one. Nothing could be clearer. The level of service has decreased quite dramatically over the past five years.

Despite the Minister's remarks, the order is typical of the Government. It fails to address the real health needs of the people of Northern Ireland. It also fails to guarantee that the necessary financial resources will be provided. We oppose the order.

10.59 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The order gives effect to proposals in the White Paper entitled "Working for Patients" and the Northern Ireland Office's policy paper entitled "People First". It is broadly analogous to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 of Great Britain. Whereas that Bill received proper legislative scrutiny, the order will have less than one and a half hours' scrutiny, without any line-by-line Committee consideration. It is impossible to do justice to health services in Northern Ireland, not to mention the order itself. Not only does the legislative process suffer, but patients will likewise suffer. People are not being put first. As I told the Minister recently, the consultative process resembles the worst experiences of patients in some surgeries—the doctor is already writing out the prescription before he has consulted or examined the patient. The procedure is an insult to parliamentary democracy. The Minister said that he did not have time to explain the order, but the Government are unwilling to debate it for a longer period.

I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box on this major occasion. He is the third Minister with responsibility for health care provision in Northern Ireland since consultations began on the draft order. Obviously, we have moved beyond a second opinion—we now have a third opinion. In this pseudoscientific and superstitious age, some people hope that the third time might be lucky.

In the 1990 MacDonald Critchley lecture, our former colleague, Enoch Powell, showed how the original National Health Service Act 1946 transferred responsibility for providing health care from a variety of different quarters largely to the hands of Government. There are, of course, two major derogations. The first limited the amount spent on the national health service to that which Parliament financed. The second derogation allowed the nature of the care provided to be vested in the discretion of individual members of the healing profession. That was wise. Few of us would cherish the Minister—delightful though he might be—diagnosing or prescribing, let alone operating on us. Nevertheless, without the Minister providing the hospital, the clinic and the theatre and hiring the staff, there would be little or no opportunity for the medical professions to practise in our system.

There has been and there is a cleavage. The physicians blame the politicians for not providing the tools that are necessary for patients to be given their statutory right to health care. The politicians, of course, to whom the nation has entrusted financial control, would quietly urge physicians to stand for election and put their theories to the test of the ballot. However, we must face an aspect that we suffer in Northern Ireland. Not only in this order but through the absence of a Select Committee, sufficient opportunity is not given to scrutinise the work of the Northern Ireland Office, its various departments and the boards under its control.

Central Government and the Northern Ireland Office cleverly contrived a device to escape from the conflict between politicians and physicians. The Government would transfer responsibility to local concerns and the professions to manage. In effect, there is a reversal of the national health service procedures. This is manifestly heightened by the accelerated development of the technology and the transfer from centrally-financed institutional care to locally-financed care in the community.

There is also the problem of getting value for money. There has not yet been developed a method whereby efficiency or value for money can truly be fully measured and compared. Within current practice, and under this order, the search will continue. Ministers to whom the responsibility has been given now seek to delegate to others. Most of us—not only those in the health field—have already suffered a ministerial answer that, in effect, says, "That is not my responsibility, but I shall direct your query to . . .". But responsibility for expenditure and for the implementation of policy should rest in this House.

That is why I question some of the fundamental points in this order. They merely continue, in a refined way, mistakes of the past. The stated aims of the order will probably be accepted by most people in Northern Ireland. The reality is otherwise. "People First", for example, called for the development of domiciliary services, such as home help, day care and respite care services, to enable people to maintain their independence—to live at home wherever possible—and to support those caring for them.

What is the practice? The Minister drew comparisons with the provision that is made in England. Even the Public Accounts Committee said that Northern Ireland indicators, rather than what is done in England, should be the test. But that is a point to which I shall return.

Mr. Maginnis: I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it would be better if the Minister were to compare like with like. In the case of home helps, the need on the mainland is not so great, in that a larger proportion of people who require that type of care live in urban areas where there are drop-in centres and other facilities. By contrast, Northern Ireland is still, by and large, a rural community, where the elderly are isolated.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I agree with my hon. Friend.

The home help service is being cut back throughout Northern Ireland. There is hopelessly inadequate provision for domiciliary physiotherapy, and occupational therapists—scarce enough in hospitals—are as rare in the community as gold dust.

There are few who dispute the desirability of improved management. However, there are many who fear two of its consequences. First, the emphasis will not be on improved health care, except as a token theory, and value for money will predominate, with the emphasis on cost rather than on care. Secondly, local management, including doctors who welcome the challenge, fear that the dead hand of bureaucratic civil servants will impede good management and progressive health provision, while local politicians and trade union representatives are explicitly excluded from the boards.

Contrary to the impression given in the explanatory memorandum, which refers to representatives of the professions, there is a mandated place for someone who holds a post in a university medical or dental school. Was I correct in understanding the Minister as saying that the Eastern board would have one person from Queen's university in that category? Will not similar provision be made for the other boards? Why, in this context, is the Eastern board mentioned specifically? Obviously, and understandably, there is a clear medical, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical input through local

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

representative committees. Those who are clearly second-class citizens are the members of the nursing profession and people who are supplemental to the practice of medicine. Without them, does anyone believe that the practice of modern medicine could continue?

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): I agree with the main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument. It is evident that what is happening in Northern Ireland is happening elsewhere in the United Kingdom and certainly in Scotland. Does he understand that we have the same feelings about the cuts that he and his people are suffering? If we support him, it is a matter of solidarity, not necessarily political, but solidarity in saying to the Government that the cuts are not justified.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I take the point that the hon. Gentleman makes.

The real loser appears to be the consumer, whether represented by local councillors or concerned citizens who have given so much of their time in the current district committees. "People First" obviously did not mean people's representatives. Although the stated aim of the Government was to remove political influence on boards, clearly any change of Government will mean that it is much easier to impose governmental political direction on an area board. Even under the present system, a chairman can be removed if he does not follow the ministerial mandate or the Department's diktat. John Simpson, the former chairman of the eastern board, is a perfect example of that.

Naturally the Minister will put the best possible gloss on the changes. We have been told that the system of a health committee backing a district health authority works in England, so it should work in Northern Ireland. However, the criticisms levelled at health care provision in England would not convince many that the system has worked. Surely real local interest and commitment would improve it.

The abolition of area boards already reduces the input of local councillors as it makes the new boards managerial. The suggestion that the abolition of 16 local district committees with around 320 members and their replacement by four health and social services councils with 102 members would produce better local involvement makes the mind boggle. Perhaps it says something about the numeracy of the Department and the logical processes behind the legislation.

The crumb of power to set up sub-committees covering geographic or subject interests might seem attractive. However, in an area where unjustified slurs of second-rate citizenship have been made, for the first time the Government have legislated for second-rate committee members. They can be on a sub-committee but they are not given full committee status.

Why should the Minister appoint the chairman of each council? Why should not the committees, as the legislation says, elect their own chairperson? I know that the explanation offered is that in that way the whistle will be blown quickly and the committees will get started. Is not the reason, as has been suggested, to set the pattern of appointment of those who will obey the master's voice?

It should be remembered that each area board and health and social services council deals with, not only health matters, as in Britain, but with social services, which are the responsibility of local authorities in Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) underlined the fact that the population of Northern Ireland is comparatively small and sparse. Local identities are cherished and local people should be involved in this task. Even now I appeal to the Minister for a commitment to think again and to take steps to enlarge the councils so that sub-committees thereof can cover the 16 areas as full members representing consumer interests.

I welcome the gesture already made by increasing the size of the Eastern board's advisory council. That in itself justifies the argument that I have set forth, not on a personal basis but on behalf of my party and the association of district committees. I also welcome the commitment to give councils the explicit right to join together in an association.

In conclusion, I should like to raise some practical matters. Who will be responsible for overseeing the precise delivery mechanisms at local level? If health and social service councils are to be more concerned with the nature, range and quality of the services available, surely the precise mechanisms will impinge on the quality of the services. There will be greater costs in providing access points for the public to reach area boards and health councils. There is also the question of unnecessary waste in the service, as illustrated by the provision of temporary cardiac theatres in the Royal Victoria hospital and the transfer of gynaecological services in wards 23 and 24.

I have drawn the Minister's attention to complaints made at a public meeting in Belfast where I was a speaker. They referred to the poor laundry service, threadbare sheets and a toilet without a seat at a teaching hospital. Where was the management or supervision? Is not help required from a local district committee to press the board and Department for adequate provision? The scope of visitation demanded would be too great for such a small council to undertake without the equivalent of district committees.

I want to put on record what happened when I took to the Department and the board a problem at a residential home. I was told that they had investigated it and that there was no substance in the complaint. In due time the home was closed. I discovered later that one of those giving advice in that area to the Department and the board was a general practitioner who was on a retainer fee of £3,000 a year to service a home. That was the independent advice.

In the Minister's statement to the media announcing the draft order, he said:

> "Boards will normally be expected to provide members or officers to speak to the council or to answer questions relating to specific issues."

What would be considered abnormal and therefore prevent such representatives going to health and social service councils?

In the light of the travesty of democracy perpetrated on the people of Northern Ireland and the numerous questions which the draft order leaves unanswered, I will be advising my hon. Friends and all right-thinking Members to vote against it.

11.16 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): This is a sad evening for me and a sad day for democracy and for the health services in Northern Ireland. We have before us a draft order which is specialised, complicated and detailed. We have 90 minutes in which to debate it. In opening the debate, the Minister took just over a quarter of that time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] It is a shame. It is a disgrace that the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland have to give their names to a debate which is not a debate and to a consideration of an order which is not a consideration.

The people of Northern Ireland will feel that we are failing them if we do not register our protest at the contempt with which the Government are treating them. Indeed, the Government are treating the representatives of all the political parties with contempt. We are taking part in a charade if we consent to the order. That is why I will join the other hon. Members from Northern Ireland in the No Lobby.

As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), we had an excellent hospital and health service under the old Stormont Government, no matter what criticisms there may have been. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) would agree that the hospital service was in excellent condition then, but that it has deteriorated ever since. The order will lead to further deterioration. Certainly there will be a deterioration in democracy and in the rights of patients. Surely patients must come first.

When we are told by the people of Northern Ireland to put their points of view here, it is right for them to know just how limited we are, because the order, if taken as a Bill, would have had a Second Reading, a Committee stage, a Report stage and a Third Reading—many hours over several weeks with plenty of time given to its consideration. We are being denied that tonight.

All I can do in the time available to me is to relate the order to my constituency, the North Down area. I echo the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall): we have a manifestation of a lack of funding for the services in that area. We need an improvement in services, but the order will not bring that about. For example, Bangor is a town with an ever-growing population. It has a higher percentage of elderly people than most other parts of the Province. Will the Minister investigate the disposal of the board's budget? Less money per head of the population is spent on hospital and social services in Bangor than in any other area in Northern Ireland.

Time after time I have protested in the House about the way in which the Government have whittled away at the hospital services in North Down. Every protest I have made has been met with the answer that enormous sums are being spent in the Eastern board area, which includes Bangor, Holywood, Dundonald, Belfast, the Ards and other parts of County Down. Belfast obtains a large slice of the budget of the Eastern health board. I make no complaint about that. The hospitals in that area deserve sufficient funds to provide an adequate service to the people of Belfast. My complaint is that insufficient funds are provided, for example, for the Bangor hospital or the Ulster hospital, which should be regarded as a North Down hospital, but is not.

I am angry at the way in which the Government are undermining the health service in Northern Ireland. The board, which is the servant of the Government and the Northern Ireland Office, must take responsibility for implementing the Government's decisions and cuts. The board has undertaken several reorganisations and operational plans, but each one, despite a blaze of publicity about providing a better service, has meant a further attack on the local health service.

It would be wrong to say that everyone suffers. No expense has been spared on the Eastern board's headquarters. Even the carpet was specially woven with the initials of the Eastern health and social services board. Why they had to have their initials on the carpet, I do not know. Certainly, the people of the area would prefer to see the money spent on their hospitals and social services.

Acute beds may be closed in North Down, hospital facilities may be slashed and the Crawfordsburn hospital may be closed, but the bureaucracy of the Eastern health board will ensure that it does not suffer. It would be interesting to see how the salaries of headquarters' staff have climbed over the years. Perhaps the Minister would make a statement on the total salaries paid today to staff at headquarters compared with that 20 years ago and compared with the expenditure on hospital beds in the area.

I have long argued for a new hospital for the North Down area. In view of the Government's attitude in the past few years, I know that it is unrealistic to expect them to provide one, although it is needed. I call on the Government tonight to respect the needs of the people of North Down by renovating and revitalising the Bangor hospital and by providing a casualty department and other medical facilities for this important area with its high-density population.

The board proposed to close the Connor surgical wing at Bangor hospital, which consists of 16 beds, on the excuse that the occupation rate of all the surgical beds in the hospital was low. As a result of the clamour and protest that I made about that proposal, however, the board changed its mind. The chairman stated that the board decided "after careful consideration" that 18 of the 24 beds in the ground floor surgical ward should be temporarily closed. Why was such "careful consideration" not given in the first instance when the board originally decided to close the Connor wing? Even now I do not trust the board when it says that the beds will be closed temporarily.

There is a long waiting list for operations in Northern Ireland. I do not want the Minister to tell me how long the waiting lists are in England—I am not interested in that. It is up to the Members representing the English constituencies to attack the Government on those delays. I represent the people of Northern Ireland and they are right to complain about the long waiting lists. I do not blame the specialists, the consultants or the doctors at the various hospitals. They are doing the best job possible and I should like to put on record that we have among the finest consultants and doctors in our hospitals in Northern Ireland who specialise in, for example, cancer, heart disease and burns. I also pay tribute to our nurses who do an excellent job.

The waiting lists in Northern Ireland are far too long and I do not believe that the order will do anything but lengthen them. Those lists are a disgrace, because no account is given to the pain and suffering or anxiety that is caused to the person awaiting hospital treatment.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that each of us from Northern Ireland could have kept this debate going for three hours? We could provide examples of widowers who have come to our advice centres and appealed to us to try to persuade the Minister to make more money available to reduce the long waiting lists for heart surgery in Belfast. They have made that appeal because they have lost wives who may have been on those lists for up to 18 months, but missed the opportunity of an operation. Those men and their families do not want another husband to lose their life-long companion in such circumstances.

Mr. Kilfedder: I agree with my hon. Friend, who rightly speaks with compassion on this matter.

I am aware that other hon. Members want to participate so I shall conclude by mentioning the important issue of home help services. In doing so I am aware that I have not dealt with all the other matters that should be considered.

I agree with the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) that the home-help service has been cut. I know of cases in which, if that service has not been taken away completely, it has been cut to half an hour on one or two days a week. That is disgraceful. It is in the best interests of elderly people for them to stay in their own homes for as long as humanly possible. To do so, however, they need the services of home helps and district nurses. It is wrong that such home help services are no longer provided as they once were.

The order will not help the health services in Northern Ireland and I intend to vote against it.

11.28 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

When the Minister introduced the order he said that it was the most significant piece of legislation on health and social services since 1972. So, after 29 years, we are reorganising our health and personal social services with a 90-minute debate. I add my voice to that of other hon. Members representing Northern Ireland who have said that that is a total disgrace.

Because of the limit on time, I can only sketch a broad canvas. The order cannot be amended in any respect. It deals mainly with general practitioner services and acute hospital sector services. It makes only passing reference to long-stay hospitals and community health services which care primarily for the mentally ill and handicapped, the elderly and the physically handicapped. Demography proves that these sectors are growing in number and imposing more demands on services. Yet all these aspects find little place in the order.

As with the legislation for England, Scotland and Wales, this order must be seen in its political context—of the dogmatism that subscribes purely to the profit motive and privatisation, in the wrong belief that only those can bring about efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The funding crisis in the national health service has provided the political opportunity to apply these so-called theories to the health services, in spite of the fact that public opinion in poll after poll has shown itself dogmatically opposed to such changes. Even 66 per cent. of taxpayers are prepared to take their money out of their pockets and put it into the public coffers to sustain a better health service.

If the Minister is critical of some of the comments about cuts that he will hear this evening, let him examine the budget of the Eastern health and social services board for the fiscal year 1989-90. He will discover there, dramatically exposed, the consequences of short funding—in respect of home helps and the geriatric and psychiatric divisions, all of which have contracted.

I should like to be more parochial tonight and to discuss the deprived area of Down and its need for a hospital, but I dare not stray because of the limits on our time.

My party certainly does not oppose a review of the health services. Comprehensive and equitable provision of health care, funded from taxation, is an integral part of our political philosophy, and we accept that there is a continuous necessity for any Government to decide what proportion of national resources should be devoted to health. Equally, however, we are concerned that such provision should be responsive to need, and it should deliver high-quality care and be as efficient as possible in the use of the resources allocated to it.

We do not believe that the radical proposals for the so-called "internal health market" will retain equality of access, improve the quality of care or release resources for better distribution. The patient will have less choice of hospital, and some of the proposals raise distinct fears about the long-term future of a comprehensively publicly funded service, as well as short-term fears about the effect of diverting resources away from patient care and towards the reorganisation of management structures and financial procedures.

The order appears to concentrate on devising financial and administrative structures to encourage hospitals and GPs to compete for patients. It fails to identify the most important problems facing the health service in the 1990s, among which are chronic under-funding, the growing number of elderly people, and the persistent inequalities in health and health care as between different levels of income. The order does not deal with the importance of income, education or even housing in the prevention of much ill health.

The problem of unnecessary and expensive prescribing by GPs would be better dealt with by medical audit, education and encouragement than by indicative budgets. The new contract for GPs which provides incentives to have large lists will reduce the quality of care, especially in the socially deprived areas.

We are opposed to budgets for general practitioners, because every decision that a doctor makes on patient care will have two elements—the normal and expected one of clinical diagnosis, and the new one of the financial implications of any treatment the patient might need. That will be damaging to patient-doctor relationships, and will lead to larger practices, longer waiting lists, the doctor not being able to give patients enough attention, further deprivation of the poor, and a lower standard of service to the rural areas.

My party is opposed to self-governing hospitals, which will be responsible only to the Department of Health and Social Services. Such hospitals will make it impossible for regional health boards to plan comprehensive services. These hospitals will have every incentive to concentrate on the highly profitable sectors of care rather than on serving the local community and the chronically sick. The freedom to set their own pay levels, to borrow on the commercial

market and to deal in assets cannot fail to have a deleterious effect on the other board hospitals in the area. We shall end up with a system of two-tier hospitals.

I support the comments of other hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies about the new management advisory structures. I was greatly concerned to see that the order allows for the removal of local elected councillors from the new health boards, which will have no elected representatives. Northern Ireland already has a rather weak system of local government, and this move further erodes local democracy. It is essential to have strong representation from the councils in the area, and they should have adequate resources to monitor the services. The local district health committees, close as they were to the problems, had great difficulties coming to grips with the assessment and interpretation of factors. How much more difficult will it be for the four area boards?

One of the great achievements of the NHS is that it has been a national service, and that essential facilities and therapeutic skills are available to people wherever they live. I am strongly opposed to the ending of the national pay negotiations, which ensured that the doctor, the nurse, the radiologist and the cleaner were paid the same wherever they worked. The introduction of local pay negotiations will inevitably lead to a loss of skilled staff from the peripheral areas and to a worsening of employment conditions for the unskilled who will have to remain. I ask the Minister to note some of the anomalies that will appear as a result of the order.

How is the consumer's choice to be extended when he can choose only his doctor, and not the services that the doctor has contracted for, either in consultancies or in hospitals? How far will competition be allowed to develop, and which units of provision will go out of business? If there is only one hospital in an area, will it retain its monopoly? A new self-governing hospital will have a privileged position on borrowing and staffing. Is that fair competition, as the Minister called it?

Competition seems to be the bedrock of this order. Is there hard information, or will there be in the foreseeable future, on the comparative prices and quality of service delivery? I do not think that there is the equipment to do that now or soon. All that I can see is a huge increase in management costs, rather than improvements in the services to patients. The average 5 per cent. administrative costs that we have will escalate rapidly to the 20 per cent. average in the USA. That will deprive the patients of resources that should be directed to them.

11.39 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I have been left with four minutes, of which I am told that the Minister would like five so that he can reply to the debate. He will clearly not get his five and I shall have little time to do anything more than protest about the farce that the debate has become.

The Minister need not be in the least bit sad about not being able to reply to the debate because it is he and his Government who are in control of the timetable of the House and they could have given the House adequate time to debate this important issue.

Apart from constitutional matters—this is close to a constitutional matter—there is no more important matter for the House to discuss. To debate major changes in health and social services in an hour and a half is impossible.

I am happy to congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I have known him for some time and his personality and ability will enable him to make a great contribution to health and social services in Northern Ireland. But he has drawn the short straw tonight in having to bring this kind of legislation to the House in the manner in which he has been asked to do so.

The legislation will in effect hand over complete control of health and social services to non-elected individuals—people who are not accountable to anybody in Northern Ireland. The previous health and social services board had some form of accountability in Northern Ireland to ensure that a number of district councillors were appointed to those boards. Schedule 1 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 specified the number that there should be on the board. Now the Minister's grand reform of health and social services in Northern Ireland will wipe away the elected representatives from the board, ensuring that only the Government's yes men will get to the top of the administration.

To make it worse, the Minister has ensured that 50 per cent. of those who will control health and social services in Northern Ireland will be his employees. If ever there were people who would jump when the Minister says jump, it is those whom he employs. Those who pay wages control loyalty. I rather suspect that the order will push forward health and social services in Northern Ireland by ensuring that there will be no resistance or objection to the way in which those matters are dealt with.

The net effect of the order is bureaucratic incest. The officers of the board are themselves allowed to elect further officers to the board. The order is supposed to be for the good of health and social services in Northern Ireland but it will not contribute to their betterment. It is unhealthy and I suspect that it will result in a bad service to the people of Northern Ireland.

11.42 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I am grateful to be called, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that I am the only hon. Member present who attended throughout an earlier debate in the House on health matters. I was not called on that occasion and——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 107.

Division No. 54] **[11.43 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Boscawen, Hon Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Bottomley, Peter
Amos, Alan	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Arbuthnot, James	Bowis, John
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Brazier, Julian
Ashby, David	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Baldry, Tony	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bellingham, Henry	Burns, Simon
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Burt, Alistair
Bevan, David Gilroy	Butterfill, John
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Carrington, Matthew
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Carttiss, Michael

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Riddick, Graham
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Benton, Joseph
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Trimble and
Mr. William Ross.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

Northern Ireland Social Services (Consequential Provisions)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): We now come to motion 3——

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it not be more sensible to have the vote now, and then an hour and a half of debate after that?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that we will do it in the usual manner.

11.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to move,

That the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

The order has, in fact, already been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

As a result of the changes proposed in the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, a number of Acts passed by the Westminster Parliament, applying solely to Great Britain or the United Kingdom as a whole, will require amendment. The amendments are purely consequential, and concern—inter alia—extending the remit of the Clinical Standards Advisory Group to Northern Ireland, widening the scope of the NHS contract provisions to include additional Northern Ireland bodies, certain tax matters and parliamentary disqualification. They are contained in a separate Order in Council, the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order——

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Hanley: Of course I will give way.

Mr. Ross: This is a dialogue, not a monologue.

The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to article 3, which amends the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975. Surely this is a most unusual way in which to introduce disqualification for membership of the House. Is there not a more reasonable way, involving a list of disqualifications which is published periodically, with the list being amended? Then everyone would know that a matter of real constitutional importance was at issue. It is disgraceful to bury it in a small order like this.

Mr. Hanley: I cannot agree that this is a disgraceful way in which to proceed. The measure is merely a consequential amendment and, as I have said, has been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. There is nothing secret about it; the item has been published for some time, and the changes will appear in due course in the list to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

It only remains to say that, being purely consequential, the order will not take up a great deal of time.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Apparently the Minister is not giving way.

11.57 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): Her Majesty's Opposition will waive the right to speak this evening, in order to allow hon. Members from the Province to do so.

11.58 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I, too, wish to be generous. I welcome the Minister to his post. As a consequence of the time restriction on the earlier debate and the limitation on the debate of this order, I shall confine my remarks to a single issue in the hope that it will be possible to establish whether the Secretary of State, acting jointly with the Northern health and social services board, can remedy the dissatisfaction of my constituents. The board proposes to close acute facilities at my hospital in Larne, to provide acute services for my constituents in an area hospital in Antrim. It will take much hard work by all those concerned, acting jointly, to satisfy my constituents.

Phase one of the new Antrim hospital will be completed in 1993, at a cost of £40 million. Funding may never be found for phase two, as Coleraine has bid for a new hospital on a green-field site. Phase two is unnecessary as it would result in avoidable inequality of provision. There has been widespread opposition to the board's proposals for the Moyle but widespread support for the retention and development of acute services at the Moyle hospital in Larne.

That cross-community support is representative of the views of all Church groups, industry, schools, clubs, organisations, GPs in the catchment area and Larne borough council. Fifteen thousand people petitioned the council, and 2,500 letters have been sent to the Department. This is an example of the community acting jointly to protect their own interests. It is necessary, therefore, that those in the Department, the Minister and the board act jointly to protect those interests.

The Moyle hospital report shows clearly that my constituents in east Antrim are being treated differently from others in Northern Ireland and in the Northern health board area and are being discriminated against. The policy being pursued by the Northern health and social services board——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. I realise that he was not able to speak in the previous debate, but I am finding it difficult to relate his speech to the consequential amendments. Perhaps he will draw my attention to the part of the consequential amendments to which he is addressing his remarks.

Mr. Beggs: I refer you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to article 7(5) on the need for those involved to act jointly and to article 7(2) on the functions of the boards, which cover the board's policy on Moyle hospital in my constituency.

The policy being pursued does not coincide with the policy of the Government, of the former Prime Minister or of the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. "Strategy for the Development of Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland"—HMSO 1975—made a clear declaration

"To promote, having regard as appropriate to consideration of parity with Great Britain the health and social welfare

[Mr. Beggs]

of Northern Ireland. Provided on a co-ordinated and accessible basis and delivered in a manner that is acceptable to individual and communities."

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), when Prime Minister, advised:

"Do not take as much to the centre as you can, but take as much to the periphery as you can."

We in Larne are right on the periphery. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said:

"It is my abiding aim that all sections of the community in Northern Ireland enjoy equality of opportunity and provision of services."

Many patients in east Antrim are already almost 20 miles away from acute services. It is unreasonable to expect them to travel 36 to 38 miles for acute services at Antrim.

The Moyle hospital services a large coastal area, including the isolated glens of Antrim and Islandmagee. In-patients and out-patients have access to a comprehensive range of services. Approximately 95 per cent. of all patients referred to Moyle hospital are treated there efficiently and effectively.

Statistics produced by the Department of Health and Social Services show a steady increase in activity at the Moyle hospital. There was a 21 per cent. increase in operations carried out in the period 1984 to 1988.

The highest activity level of all hospitals in the Northern health and social services board area is recorded at Moyle hospital in Larne, but the board proposes to close the hospital's acute facilities. I pay tribute to the staff at all levels for the success achieved by Moyle hospital. The present policy must be reappraised independently. Future provision should be determined now and not after the proposed changes have been implemented.

Lord Skelmersdale and the NHSSB provided further evidence of discrimination against the population of east Antrim by giving assurance to an NHSSB member and the chairman of the new Coleraine hospital campaign group that the appraisal team studying acute hospital provision for the Coleraine triangle would have total freedom to assess all hospital needs for that area.

That contrasts sharply with the response to requests from the Moyle action committee that its report, produced with professional and objective advice, would be accepted by the Minister, principal officers at the Department and the NHSSB as an official option appraisal, that it should be considered by an impartial team and not by a partially discredited four-man NHSSB team that was already committed to the Antrim area hospital concept.

It was indicative of how meaningless consultation had become when no request was made for the Touche Ross report which should have been scrutinised alongside the Moyle hospital report. Over £40,000 was spent to produce that credible report and that was paid for largely by voluntary subscriptions and by support from Larne borough council.

Experts will confirm the belief that the NHSSB has used poor planning methodologies and did not seriously consider alternative patterns of provision. The NHSSB's proposals for Moyle hospital are doomed for the following reasons: they are based on out-of-date planning criteria; the patients will choose not to use the new Antrim hospital and will instead travel to the large teaching hospitals in Belfast; and the Antrim hospital will receive no income from east Antrim when it needs funds and when finance follows patients.

General practitioners in east Antrim have established referral patterns to Moyle hospital in Larne or to Belfast. East Antrim GPs will in future accept patient choice and refer them to Belfast hospitals if Moyle hospital ceases to be an option.

The retention of high-quality local acute services at Larne is justified on the basis of population, remoteness of parts of the coastal area, the importance of local heavy industry, of which there is the greatest concentration outside Belfast, the demand for accident emergency services, the continuing growth of tourism and traffic through Larne harbour and, finally, but by no means least, to meet the wishes of the patients and the medical profession.

The lives and limbs of patients will be put at risk if the present proposals are implemented. Costs to the community and to the NHSSB would be shown to be too high to justify transferring acute services from Moyle to the Antrim hospital if only the board would give the report an impartial appraisal.

Unlike the narrow, blinkered proposals of the NHSSB, the Moyle hospital report has provided alternatives for consideration that will eliminate inequalities and save capital expenditure which would have to be incurred if phase two of Antrim hospital proceeds. By comparison, modest expenditure at Moyle hospital will enable our local hospital to meet the needs of most patients for the foreseeable future and utilise expertise that is already available in Belfast.

The proposals in the report will save public expenditure and, at the same time, protect local services. I seek the support of the House to protect and to develop acute services at Moyle hospital and secure proper provision of hospital services, in keeping with Government policy, for my constituents.

I hope that those brief remarks will encourage an impartial reappraisal and that the Minister will seriously consider ensuring that no final decision is made until there has been an impartial analysis and until, if necessary, the strategic team with responsibility for the report has an opportunity to make further representations to him. I repeat that he should grasp the nettle and face up to his unique opportunity as a newly appointed Minister to provide a more cost-effective, equitable and acceptable acute hospital service to my constituents.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a very narrow, technical order. I have allowed the remarks of the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) to go rather wide because he was interrupted almost in the middle of his first sentence in the previous debate. I remind the House again that we are discussing whether the amendments are made necessary by the order that has just been pased. Remarks must therefore be directed to that comparatively narrow point.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are we entitled to argue that there should be further consequential amendments if we believe that they arise from the order that has already been passed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That will be in order, as long as it is strictly related to the order now before us.

Mr. Cryer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Rather than speak in the debate, I can dispose of the point by raising a point of order. The Minister invoked the fact that the instrument had been before the Joint Select Committee on Statutory Instruments to indicate some sort of endorsement of the order. However, you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Joint Committee can consider only technical matters—for example, whether the order is ultra vires or whether the Minister has made an unusual use of powers. We are not allowed to report to the House on the merits of the order. Therefore, the fact that it has been before the Committee does not imply any endorsement of the merits of the order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is the Chairman of the Committee, for making that point clear.

12.11 am

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I join hon. Members who have expressed concern about the way in which the legislation has been brought before the House—by Order in Council. Those of us who try responsibly to represent the views of our constituents are precluded from doing so by time constraints.

In the previous Order in Council, which we debated for an hour and a half, there are about 21 pieces of Northern Ireland legislation which require consequential amendment and which are listed under schedule 5. We are now debating the consequential effect on other legislation relating to health and personal social services. I do not believe that it is possible in a short period fully to appreciate the consequences of 27 other pieces of legislation. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, like many others that are listed, demonstrates how the administration of health and social services is dependent on the right blend of bureaucracy and community participation. It is to the relationship with that Act that I draw the attention of the House. I do not believe that we have here a proper blend between the administrators—the bureaucrats—and those who are responsible for ensuring that the health and social services are run for the benefit of the consumer.

Previously, in the area of democracy and public accountability, the health and social services boards at least appeared to have some independence in the role they played. However, as those boards came towards the end of their life, it became more and more obvious that they were merely extensions of the Department of Health and Social Services. In that respect, what we are now faced with presents us with no great change. To meet the requirements enshrined in all these consequential provisions we should have had some properly firmed-up proposals in relation to the health and social services councils. But there are no such proposals. The whole matter of the councils has been treated in the most vague and offhand manner. Having lost our district health committees, where the voice of the consumer was heard, we cannot be assured that we shall have an effective means of making that voice heard in the future. No one—certainly not anyone who has had experience of the health and social service boards—believes that these proposals will adequately achieve that purpose.

Beyond naming the councils and making provision for district council representation, the legislation is vague and lacking in detail. It allows the Department to make of the councils what it will. They are not the voice of the consumer, but rather a shadowy means of representation that, it is safe to say, will be dominated by their chairmen, who will be powerful people appointed by the Minister to direct the energies of the councils as he and the Department wish. Enabling measures of the kind that are enshrined in the order can give the public no confidence that their views will carry any weight in the management process.

Mr. Hanley: The whole point of the new councils is that they should add weight to the process. The fact that three of the councils will have 24 members and that the eastern council will have 30 indicates that a very large number of people from a very wide cross-section of the population will be included. Surely no chairman will have such sway. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman, as chairman, would have that sort of power, but I am sure that no other human could achieve it.

Mr. Maginnis: I cannot accept the Minister's assurance. It is obvious that if the health and social services councils were to have a real authority and effect on how the boards operated, they should have been given an authority parallel to the authority vested in Select Committees of the House of Commons. They should have been able to operate as consumer watchdogs and their role and authority should have been clearly defined in the wider context of decision making and management arrangement within the health and social services.

Mr. Peter Robinson: In view of the Minister's intervention, does the hon. Gentleman find it difficult to understand how the Minister could tell the House earlier that it was necessary to reduce the size of the health and social services board because it was unwieldy to have as many as 30 members? I think that I quote the Minister correctly and that *Hansard* will show that I do. Yet the Minister now tells us that the health and social services councils can be unwieldy and have that number of members. Does not the hon. Gentleman find it strange that the Minister gives power and authority to people who are not elected representatives and puts them on a pedestal above those who are elected representatives? What effect will that have on the body politic in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are not dealing with the previous order. The House has dealt with that. We are dealing with this one, which involves consequential amendments.

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for reminding me of that, but you will understand our difficulty. We do not have—I am sure that you do not have—all the consequential legislation in front of us. Therefore, we must try to recall the effects that some of the amendments will have. I am trying to deal with the spirit of the legislation, which will be affected by these consequential matters.

I should have thought that health and social services councils ought to reflect the plurality of interests in the provision of services. If professional care staff are to be prohibited from membership, adequate arrangements must be made to permit them to advise health and social services councils of their views about services and their

[Mr. Maginnis]

assessments of service needs and proposed policies. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us how he envisages that professional opinion will be expressed and will manifest itself through the system. There is no point in allowing doctors and nurses to manage the hospitals unless they can influence those who have financial control.

Mr. Hanley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maginnis: I am sure that the Minister will answer me in some detail at the end of the debate. Perhaps I could pose some other questions for him to answer later.

Health and social services councils should be adequately resourced to enable them to conduct in-depth scrutinies of services and general policies as they affect consumer interests. The independent authority and status of the councils is not addressed but should surely be guaranteed in recognition of the council's monitoring and representative roles and in order to secure public confidence.

Should not the health and social services councils have the right to receive appropriate information to allow them to discharge their function and to require the attendance of board officers to provide information? Where is that established either in the original order or in any of the consequential amendments? I have not been able to find it properly detailed anywhere. While the role of the health and social services councils should be to concentrate on matters of general public interest, there should be arrangements for council members to raise individual local or specific concerns with the board or appropriate board officers.

In general, the role of the councils should be seen as equating with that of a parliamentary Select Committee. While the activities of a Select Committee relate to a Government Department, the activities of the health and social services councils would relate to the policies of the boards. The scrutinising powers of the councils should therefore be equivalent to those of a Select Committee. Unless we have an assurance from the Minister that he will take seriously the demise of district committees and ensure that the health and social services councils can effectively —I emphasise "effectively"—replace them, we will have to go back to our constituents and tell them that they have no control as consumers over the services provided.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I note my hon. Friend's argument on the consequential order. Does he accept that if the health and social services councils are given the powers of a Select Committee to deal with boards, there is a greater argument for a Select Committee of the House to scrutinise the Department of Health and Social Services and the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) will not widen the debate to cover a matter which is not related to the order.

Mr. Maginnis: I have to concur entirely with my hon. Friend. For far too long we have drawn the short straw. Tonight is the saddest example that I have seen in eight years in the House. Here we are, dealing with something which affects every member of the community in Northern Ireland from the moment of birth——

Rev. Martin Smyth: And before it.

Mr. Maginnis: Indeed. From before birth to the moment of death we are dependent on the hospital service. I cannot think of any other service, including education —I came from the education service—in which it is so important to have the confidence of the community and with which the community should feel comfortable and at ease.

The Minister lauded the idea of 30-member councils. Many of us know that the larger a committee, the less effective is its work because it is impossible for every member to play a part. If I recall correctly, my health and social services board, the Southern board, recommended that councils be restricted to 16 or 18 members, and certainly not more than 20. If the Minister had taken that advice, he might have been able to find some way of accommodating the people who selflessly and generously gave of their time in district committees in the past, albeit perhaps not with the same status. Many feel brushed aside and that their services over many years have not been appreciated. It will become increasingly important to have small groups of people closely allied to individual hospitals who can reflect to members of the health and social services councils what happens on a day-to-day basis.

The amending legislation deals with value added tax, income tax and corporation tax. They are all important, yet we have not heard from the Minister why they are important. I doubt whether many people who listen to the debate understand the relevance.

I am greatly disturbed that the individual units of management will be encouraged to raise funding privately. I am talking not about hospital trusts, but about raising funding for a hospital, whether through franchises of shops in the entrance to the hospital or ordinary charitable fund raising. There has been no explanation of how that money will be handled. For the more assiduous and energetic fund-raising team in a particular unit of management, will it mean the withdrawal of resources provided directly from the Department? It might have been more generous if the Minister had thought of some sort of pound-for-pound scheme which would reward industry in this respect. It might have reassured the consumer if he had known that such money would be kept in an account separately from other funds and used to enhance the service rather than to replace money which should rightly come from the Government.

There are many deserving charitable causes and in Northern Ireland the community is noted for its response to charitable appeals. How is the ordinary small but worthy charity to compete with large, well-organised units of health management where professional fund raisers can be employed? We may well diminish the good work that is carried out voluntarily by people who work for the good of the community.

Those thoughts have occurred to me when I have looked at the order. Although it lists consequential amendments, we do not and cannot judge the effect of the changes simply because we have had neither the time nor the information from the Department early enough for us to judge the effect of what we are supposed to accept here tonight for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland.

This is a sad state of affairs. I hope that we are not going to have to continue to legislate in the dark or in semi-darkness, not quite knowing what we have got and not quite knowing where we shall be led.

Rev. Martin Smyth *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Gentleman, but I remind him that he spoke in the previous debate. However, I am sure that he will not cover the ground that was debated in the previous order.

12.34 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate being called. I recognise that your task, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is as difficult as our own because of the decision of the Government managers not to meet the simple request to have a longer debate on the main order. I have no intention of repeating what I said in the earlier debate, save to say that the Minister was unable to answer the debate because of the time allotted to it. We are therefore still in the dark about the impact of the order.

I want to draw to the Minister's attention two minor points which may nevertheless have some impact. I should like that clarified. I appreciate that the Minister said that the orders had already been before the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, but it is important to be clear about their implications.

Paragraph 3(a) contains the words:

"'or any member, not being also an employee'".

Does that mean that if a person is not an employee but is on the board he or she would be disqualified from standing for Parliament? Does it mean that, if such a person was an employee of the board, he would be allowed to stand for Parliament, but would subsequently be required to resign?

Why does the order state:

"in the entry beginning 'Chairman of a Health and Social Services Board' after 'Chairman' there shall be inserted 'or any member, not being also an employee'"?

We require some elucidation on that.

In the amendment to the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, provision is made that

"A mechanically propelled vehicle shall not be chargeable with any duty under this Act at a time when it is used or kept on a road by a health and social services body"

How much money will be saved to the authorities as a result? Where will that money go? The Minister will be aware that problems have arisen about providing transport to day centres, and the like. In my constituency people have been denied the opportunity to go to the local day centre, Orchardville, because of a lack of funds and services.

The thrust of the orders seems to be a move towards care in the community, and encouragement has been given to voluntary and community groups. Will the vehicle excise allowances made in the consequential order be extended to those groups?

12.38 am

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In common with other hon. Members who have spoken in the two necessarily linked debates, I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. On future occasions we hope that he will be able to deal with matters in a more acceptable manner. We must record that the hon. Gentleman has made a bad start. However, that is not necessarily the Minister's fault, as he is not responsible for the legislation—its gestation occurred before his arrival at the Northern Ireland Office. Moreover, the Minister is not responsible—at least, that is what we hope—for the way in which the Government Whips have dealt with the debate.

Also like some of my colleagues, I cannot avoid referring to the way in which this legislation is being dealt with. This important measure, in the form of an Order in Council, can be debated for a mere 90 minutes, and it cannot be amended. It is not well appreciated how much procedures such as this bring this House into disrepute. While these debates attract little attention in the House, they attract attention in Northern Ireland, where people will watch them. Parts of them will be broadcast there and referred to in the press. The people of Northern Ireland will get glimpses of the House and see the acres of green Benches surrounding me.

I am conscious of this problem because, during the by-election that I fought last year, in the course of my doorstep canvassing I told people that, if they elected me, I would go to Westminster to represent their views. Time after time, electors asked me what the point was, and whether the Government would listen. Now they can see images of tonight's debates, in which we have had no chance to debate the legislation properly or to amend it.

I have seen few scenes more ludicrous than the earlier debate, in which hon. Members with weighty matters to discuss were unable to speak. I entirely sympathise with the view expressed by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and I deplore the sad treatment of my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs).

It was outrageous of the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) to ask, at the beginning of the debate, whether we could hold the vote first and the debate afterwards. It is bad enough having to deal with an Order in Council without the Conservative party demonstrating its contempt for the House, and, by implication, for Northern Ireland Members.

The second, consequential order, running only to a couple of pages, is allocated as much time for debate as the previous, much lengthier and more important order. I commend the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) for waiving the opportunity to speak to enable more of us to participate. We are grateful to him for that.

Mr. Cryer: The order arises because of powers given to the Minister many years ago to alter, by order, primary legislation passed by this House in previous years. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such powers are not a good idea, and that we should change them?

Mr. Trimble: I entirely agree that our procedures should be changed. They are indefensible. I take issue, however, with the way in which the hon. Gentleman framed his intervention. Obviously, he believes this to be secondary, not primary, legislation. But it is primary legislation. Technically, any provisions relating to Northern Ireland, not only those which could be transferred under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973, can be dealt with in this way. There are signs—I hope that they are not followed through—that the Northern Ireland Office will now try to extend the ambit of Orders in Council to cover matters that have been dealt with by the House in normal and proper legislation. A Minister recently issued a consultation document in which he proposed to legislate by Order in Council to amend an Act affecting Northern Ireland, passed less than a year ago, where only a technical change was necessary.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman is right. If it is any consolation to him, this procedure, under which Ministers are granted power to change primary legislation through

[Mr. Cryer]

statutory instruments, can be used for legislation applying to the whole of the United Kingdom. The Education Reform Act 1988 gave the Minister powers to change that Act by means of statutory instruments that did not have to come before the House. That is wrong.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is right. Consequential amendments are made not only to legislation affecting Northern Ireland but to other legislation, such as the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, the Value Added Taxes Act 1983 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, which deal with the United Kingdom as a whole. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I say that, while he is right, I do not feel much sympathy, because, if this sort of debased legislation is supposed to be fit for us, I do not see why it is not fit for him as well.

Before I was interrupted, I was commending the behaviour of the hon. Member for Wigan who had made more time available for Northern Ireland Members of Parliament to speak by not speaking himself. Sadly, I cannot commend the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) for the same behaviour. He has the unenviable record of having spoken the longest on this subject. This is remarkable, given that he does not represent anybody in Northern Ireland. Indeed, his party will not even allow people in Northern Ireland to join it, but that is another matter.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not like his comments to be misconstrued, and that he will agree that we enjoy the contributions of hon. Members who represent all parts of the United Kingdom. We wish that more of them would attend debates on Northern Ireland. I am sure that the point that the hon. Gentleman wishes to make is that the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen could have done a great deal more to ensure that we had three, not one and a half, hours for the first debate.

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is correct. We welcome contributions from all hon. Members, and should like to see all hon. Members being treated equally, regardless of party, and given the same opportunity for participation in Committees. We should also like all citizens of the United Kingdom to be treated equally, rather than some of them being discriminated against, as some are.

The order is consequential to the changes that are being made to the health service in Northern Ireland and to those made in Great Britain. Change is not always a good idea, and an unnecessary change is a bad idea.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Conservatism.

Mr. Trimble: I thought that conservatism was about preserving things from unnecessary change, and making only those changes that, from time to time, become necessary. In many respects, that is a wise philosophy. We should appreciate the extent to which changes are unsettling to people whose primary concern should not be with change. Bureaucrats love change because then they are drawing up new organisational charts, moving people around, and so on.

When there is change, the number of bureaucrats and their salaries and status always seem to inflate. But for the people delivering the service, who in the health service are primarily the doctors and the nurses, change is undesirable. I do not think that people fully appreciate the extent to which changes such as this cause confusion, uncertainty and demoralisation within the health service. I am deeply conscious of that having met °and spoken to some of the staff in Lurgan hospital in my constituency. Some are close to distraction with worry that is consequent on the changes.

In some respects, the health service is being handbagged—forgive me for using that term. I do so bearing in mind the time when the changes were initiated and the mental attitude that lay behind them. The term refers to the desire attributed to the previous Prime Minister to hit any established institution with her handbag. I would have hoped that, with the arrival of the new Prime Minister, who seems to want to demonstrate a kinder and gentler approach, the opportunity would have been taken to re-examine the changes. I do not think that they will benefit the health service or the patients and within the next year or two the Government will have to unscramble elements of the changes, not just in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom. Again, we will have the sort of change that disrupts the service.

Paragraph 3 contains a series of amendments to the House of Commons Disqualification Act. I understand that the change contained in paragraph 3(a) was made to include within the list of offices which result in disqualification from membership of the House not just the chairman, who was previously disqualified, but other members of the new boards. I presume that that reflects the changes in the character of the boards. It would not previously have been appropriate for the other members to be disqualified, because they involved a range of persons, including elected representatives. But as a result of the change there will be a different character of person on the boards; a person who is to a large extent a creature of the Minister, a person appointed by the Minister, who is in no way representative.

The change gives rise to some worries, but one particular worry that I have concerns another hospital in my constituency, at Banbridge, where the geriatric unit, known as Spelga house, presently accommodates some 35 elderly persons who are incapable of looking after themselves and need constant medical care. For some time, the board has had before it a proposal to close Spelga house, but that proposal has not yet been implemented. The board knows that, if it attempted to bring about that closure without making adequate provision for the inhabitants, the elected representatives on the board would certainly not agree and would almost certainly find ways of blocking the proposal.

That proposal, which has been dormant for some time, was suddenly brought into the limelight again a few weeks ago in December, causing considerable upset to the patients and their relatives with the prospect of a move to they knew not where. Following representations, it now becomes clear that the proposal to close the unit will be brought to the new board for active consideration in April or May.

With the old system, which allowed for elected representatives, the community had an opportunity to influence the board's decision, and was confident that it would be sensible. Consequently, officials did not bring the proposal to close that facility before the old board. However, it will be put to the new board, which will not be

representative. Many fear that that is being done to effect a closure which would not otherwise have been achieved. If that closure occurs—I hope very much that it does not—it would be entirely appropriate for article 3 to be amended to include within the range of disqualified persons the relevant Northern Ireland Minister.

Reference has been made in another context to the principle of subsidiarity, which the Government use to argue that decisions currently made by the European Commission should be devolved to national government. Subsidiarity involves devolving decision making to the lowest possible level consistent with efficiency and other considerations—which can mean not only regions but local authorities. However, the proposed changes will mean decisions being taken at a higher level. The board and committee structure is being altered, and their membership reduced, which will mean that the Department will take more decisions.

Article 7 makes reference to the new national health service contracts, and I am concerned that principal legislation will expressly provide for those contracts to be non-justiciable. Contracts that would normally be legally binding will not be, but will be enforced in other ways. It is unfortunate that a special form of law is being created in respect of those contracts, and that touches on another area of concern. The Minister made reference to the number of persons who will serve on the new councils—24 on some, 30 on another, and so on. However, that membership is not specified in the legislation. The measure describes certain provisions in general terms, but the Minister speaks as though there were hard and fast regulations, when none exist. That is an inappropriate and undesirable form of legislation, and its provisions should be spelt out in much greater detail.

One would like to deal with other aspects of the measure, but our debate is limited to the consequential amendments only. Therefore, I will merely repeat my earlier assertion that the provisions will do nothing to improve the quality of Northern Ireland's health service—and the way in which they are being introduced does nothing for parliamentary democracy.

12.58 am

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): My one hope about tonight's proceedings is that the mean-spirited business managers of this House will look upon the fiasco here this evening and learn something from it. In effect, they have gained nothing in terms of time. It would have been better by far had they given us three hours on the first order, on which we could have had a much wider debate, rather than being restricted and contained on the second order, as we necessarily are.

I wonder whether there was method in what would appear to be the business managers' madness. Was it their intention to push through the House an order which is clearly so absurd and objectionable that there would have been three hours of objections from hon. Members on both sides? Did the Government think that they would curtail that opposition to one and a half hours in the hope that little would be said about the second order?

It is clear that the views of the people of Northern Ireland, as expressed by their elected representatives—albeit in two short debates—are clearly against the order. However, it seems to mean nothing to the Minister that, as a representative of a community outside Northern Ireland, he is imposing something upon us that elected representatives from both sides of our community do not want. That is the heart of the matter that I want to discuss.

I should have liked to pay tribute, in the three minutes allocated to me in the earlier debate, to the Minister's Department, and especially to the nurses and doctors of Forster Green hospital. In the past few weeks I had an experience which allows me to pass comment on the state of our health service in Northern Ireland. My late father lay in Forster Green hospital for at least three months, and during that time, as I stayed at his bedside in the late hours and overnight, I had a first-hand glimpse of the health and social services at work. I do not for one minute believe that the nurses and doctors at that hospital are any different from those in other hospitals and, without the slightest doubt, I can say that they showed a degree of care, compassion and concern that one could never write into employment contracts for any nurse or doctor. They did a tremendous job and worked extremely hard, and they went far beyond their contract of service.

However, during that time, I must inform the Minister that I noticed how rundown our hospitals are becoming. I noticed buckets along the corridors to catch rain that was coming through the roof, because the hospital could not afford the money to repair it. I noticed the hours that staff have to work—some of the nurses went way beyond what they were contractually paid for, simply to do the job. I noticed a rundown service, and the Minister should realise that it will be a false economy if more money is not injected into the health service in Northern Ireland. I shall stop there. I should have liked to comment on that in much greater detail in the earlier debate, but now we are dealing with consequential amendments, and I can go no further down that road.

There is a consequential amendment which I think that the Minister should have included in the order, but which is not contained in it. During my earlier remarks I said that this order more than simply tinkers with the way in which health and social services are dealt with in Northern Ireland—in effect, it is a constitutional change. I shall explain that, because I think that necessary changes will be required to the Northern Ireland Constitution (Amendment) Act 1973 as a result of this order.

Since the Stormont Parliament was taken away Northern Ireland has been governed by direct rule. The only form of democracy that we have had for many years is the ability of elected representatives to speak in the House on Orders in Council in the time frame provided by its business managers—usually at this time of night, which is why I am now speaking at 1.4 am. Those concerned with the way in which Northern Ireland was being governed therefore thought it necessary to provide some form of democracy in the Province: they rightly regarded the way in which Northern Ireland was being treated at Westminster as an inadequate response. They knew that elected local representatives had a far greater input on health and personal social services in other parts of the United Kingdom, and that district councils had a much bigger say. Therefore, an essential part of the contract contained in the 1973 Act was the provision of a role for district councils in housing, education, health and social services and other functions covered by the Department of the Environment. In some instances, they had a consultative role in the council itself; in others, they were given a direct role on the boards that would control the various functions.

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

In the passing of the order that we are discussing, we have already seen a breach of that contract. As yet it has not happened in other spheres, but I have no doubt that the Minister is setting a pattern. He is taking away Northern Ireland's democracy and removing any say that elected representatives might have in health and social services. No elected representative in Northern Ireland will be a member of the board that will govern those services; no Northern Ireland Member is likely to be the Minister in overall charge of that Department—unless, of course, we have a Northern Ireland Assembly; like the Minister, I will pray hard for that. As Unionists, we are waiting to see the response of others: perhaps we shall, before the week is out. But I shall not pursue that line, as a constitutional debate about the Anglo-Irish Agreement might try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The contract that existed under the 1973 Act, as amended, provided for local democracy by way of area boards for both education and social services. The Minister has changed all that: he has taken on himself the full power to appoint whomever he wishes to the top level of health and social services in Northern Ireland, and—as a throwaway measure—he will give a minority of places on a council below the level of the board to elected representatives. I believe that the figure is 40 per cent. The Minister has given control to those whom he employs and pays.

Mr. Hanley: Forty per cent. of members will be appointed by district councils. They do not have to be elected representatives; that is up to them.

Mr. Robinson: Will those whom the Minister appoints to the boards be able, of necessity, to exclude members of district councils, or is he prepared to include them, even if he will not allocate a precise number of places to them?

Mr. Trimble: The Minister says that 40 per cent. will be elected by district councils. That is not in the legislation. The Minister is merely referring to regulations that he may make, and may intend at the moment to make; the regulations may be made in a different form.

Mr. Robinson: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Article 3 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order talks about prescribed numbers, but does not prescribe a number. The Minister might be in a good mood today and agree to 40 per cent., but tomorrow he might be in a bad mood and agree to none. That order does not require any elected representatives.

I note with disappointment the way in which members of the health and social services councils are referred to as being public representatives, as if there were some form of democracy. The truth is that they may be members of the public, but, unless they are elected representatives, they have no mandate to speak on behalf of the public. The Minister has removed the democratic principle from health and social services in Northern Ireland. The House will have taken ill his comment that, because he has had some consultation outside the House, "Democracy had been served." He allows for consultation outside the House, but it does not matter what happens inside. He believes that democracy has been served.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that such democracy is not even practised in Hong Kong, where the Legislative Council has a greater say in debating issues than Northern Ireland Members have here?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman is right. Is not it sad that eastern European countries could give the Minister a lesson on how democracy should work in Northern Ireland? He is lagging behind those who in the past he would have criticised. There is more democracy perhaps almost anywhere else in the world than in Northern Ireland. This facade of Orders in Council only serves to show—*[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) was going to make a contribution earlier, which we had looked forward to, but he did not do so.

A change is required in the order to include changes to the Northern Ireland Constitution (Amendment) Act, because the Government have squeezed democracy out of Northern Ireland and, under the order, implemented a dictatorship.

1.13 am

Mr. Hanley: I shall attempt briefly to summarise some of the points that have been made.

The speech of the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) should be a model for Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. It was generous, factual, intelligent and perfectly judged.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that change is always unwelcome. The change under the order will mean better management to deal with the increasing demands on the health and personal social services, and it therefore should be welcomed.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) spoke of the Antrim hospital and the future of the Moyle hospital. The board has deferred a decision on the pattern of services to be retained at the Moyle post-1993 and has given a commitment that, for the time being, it will seek to maintain the services that are provided there. I spoke to the board's chairman about that only last week. Final proposals on future services will be subject to the approval of the Department, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the action committee will be afforded an opportunity to make any representations that it considers appropriate.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) spoke of the different structure of the council and the new boards. They are different bodies; one is an executive management body and the other is advisory. Therefore, the difference in size is acceptable. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept the House's sympathy on the loss of his father.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) referred to professionals on boards. It is open to any board to appoint professionals to executive posts if it wishes and I would expect that most boards would want to do that. There is such a wide variety of people on the councils that there should be no reason why their views are not heard.

The hon. Member also referred to the duty of the councils. Those duties will include keeping under review the operation of health and social services in a council's area, making recommendations for improving services of the relevant board and commenting on the board's plans particularly in relation to substantial developments or

variations in the provision of services. Councils will be able to act on behalf of patients and clients in connection with complaints.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone also raised a very good point which should be stressed. I pledge tonight that I will ensure that health and social security councils will have power to obtain information from boards, and that will include making board members answer questions directly, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. He also mentioned fund raising. We regard that as an important part of the health service. There is no reason why one should want to quench voluntary donations. However, any funds raised as a result of the new powers will be additional to statutory resources and not instead of them. No one will suffer because of the generosity of those who want to spend money in that way.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) wanted to know why there was an extension to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975. That arises because the new board members will now be receiving salaries. They will be in receipt of an office of profit. Therefore, as the chairman is disqualified at present, so those new board members would be disqualified. With regard to the Vehicles (Excise) (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, the current exemptions from duty will continue and there will be no significant financial consequences.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann referred to disputes and queried the need for this new body of law. But it is not a new body of law. There are plenty of incidents in English law—and I use the term advisedly—where disputes may be sent to arbitration. There are examples in which the parties have agreed that they should not resort to going to court over an issue. As I tried to explain earlier, the disputes are not really disputes between two completely outside contracting parties; they are disputes between people within an organisation and therefore internal arbitration would seem to be more sensible.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann also referred to the 24 and 30 membership for councils. That proves that consultation achieved something. We have increased the number, although the figure is not yet carved in stone. We have shown our intention to allow the Eastern board to have 30 members and that decision was taken as a result of consultation over a considerable period.

I have listened carefully to the points and questions that have been raised and I hope that I have dealt satisfactorily with them. I shall examine the *Official Report* and, if any points have not been covered, I will write to the hon. Members concerned. I thank all hon. Members for the interest they have shown. I sympathise greatly with their frustration. This is an important issue and, in spite of the shortness of the debate, the order should be supported by the House.

Mr. William Ross: Does the Minister appreciate the number of orders that are outstanding for discussion between now and the summer recess? He can look forward to many late nights.

Mr. Hanley: As quite a lot of them are coming across my desk, I hope that the hon. Gentleman sympathises with me as much as I sympathise with him.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 22nd January, be approved.

Mr. Maginnis: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the Order Paper there is a motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Brooke relating to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill. It is not the desire of my party to impede anything that may be beneficial to the people whom we represent, but we now have a further example of a lack of information from the Northern Ireland Office. I can conjecture what the motion may be about, but I have no assurance of what it is. It may be something that I shall regret in future. Until we know what the motion is about, it will be incumbent on members of my party to object. In doing so, we regret that we may be holding up the business of the House or the Committee, but it illustrates our point about the lack of consultation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall be putting the motion. The hon. Gentleman is quite right—it is not possible to debate it after 10 o'clock. If he wishes to object to it, he is within his rights to do so.

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That it be an Instruction to Standing Committee B that they have power to amend the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill so as to make, in relation to the whole of the United Kingdom, provision for and in connection with the exercise of investigation powers by persons other than constables.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Clinical Waste Incinerators

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

1.21 am

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for the fact that it is now 21 minutes past 1 o'clock. I am sorry if I have kept him out of bed, but the issue that I am about to raise is of great interest and concern to my constituents.

A long-running saga has caused and is causing great concern in my constituency. It relates to a proposal for a clinical waste incinerator for Greater Manchester waste disposal authority, which seems to be the only body that wants it. In January 1988, when Trafford was a huge council with a Labour chairman of the planning committee—Councillor Mrs. Merry—outline planning permission was granted. We must remember that point because it is vital. I mention the political complexion of the council at that time, because some people are trying to score political points. They have a very poor case and they would be much better employed in trying not to turn the issue into a political one.

In March 1989, when the Conservatives had regained control of the council, the plans were voted out. In May 1989, the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority lodged an appeal. In November 1989, the planning inspectorate decided to hold a public local inquiry, and, on 1 December 1989, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment decided to determine the appeal himself. The inquiry was due to start on 26 June 1990. That was then changed to 12 February 1991, at the request of Trafford council and the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority, to allow time to consider amended proposals by Greater Manchester waste disposal authority.

However, in December 1990, on legal advice the council reluctantly accepted that it was not feasible to revoke the outline planning permission. Not surprisingly, the possibility of the councillors being surcharged a substantial amount had a sobering effect. It puts all of them under great pressure. The chairman of the health and housing committee stated that he did not have that sort of money in his bank account.

The chairman of the local Labour party, who, I think, will be the candidate for the ward in the local election, went public and said that he believed that there was no danger that councillors would be surcharged. I can only suggest that he puts his money where his mouth is and offers to pay the surcharge that could be imposed on councillors. It is very silly of people to make such statements about a very serious issue.

I appealed by letter to Councillor Dennis Fogg, the chairman of the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority. I asked him to get his authority to look for another site for this incinerator—a site well away from a residential area. I asked him also whether he would come to the area to meet the local residents and hear what they had to say, but the invitation was politely declined. I stressed to Councillor Fogg the anxiety of the people in the area, but he stated that the local concern was misplaced.

Ironically, another Labour councillor—Jane Baugh—takes a contrary view. In a letter to the *Sale and Altrincham Messenger,* she stated:

"What the Labour party is saying to concerned residents is 'Do not be deceived. It is propaganda attempting to allay the fears of local people.'"

We must continue to campaign against the siting of a new clinical waste incinerator for the sake of the future health of the people of Trafford.

Which councillor should we believe? Should we believe the Labour chairman of the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority, who says that there are no health risks, or should we believe Councillor Jane Baugh, who does not believe her socialist colleague? All that I know is that there are great anxieties among my constituents, and that these have not been allayed in any way at all. In fact, a group of them have set up an organisation called BRASH—Broadheath Residents Association for Safety and Health. BRASH sent the councillors who are members of the planning committee a letter dated 2 January 1991. That letter says:

"We would ask that the following be taken into consideration before a decision is made on the above application."

On the issue of clinical waste, it says:

"No decision should be taken until we have had time to contact HMIP"—

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—

"to allow them to justify their reasons for adopting the European Commission Council directive 89/369 EEC of the 8th June 1989 for this incinerator. This is applicable to municipal waste incineration plant ONLY and explicitly excludes incineration plants for medical waste from hospitals."

A note in the letter says:

"We have passed the above details on to the Director of EC Environmental Commission and we await his reply on this matter."

On the question of siting, BRASH says:

"The Council's own 'policy for incinerators' . . . states that incinerators shall not be sited within 1,000 metres of any main residential areas.

The current proposal will be within 600 metres of a highly populated residential area."

I suppose that the founders of this organisation include people from all parties and from none, but they care desperately about what is going on in the area. They are not trying to score political points. They have done a great deal of work and research. That shows just how concerned they are about what they believe could be the damaging effects on the health of people in the area in which the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority wants to locate this incinerator.

I am told that over 5,000 residents have signed a petition opposing the plan. People are incensed because they feel that the council has had to change its mind as a result of the threat of surcharge. In other words, they believe that the council has had to change its mind under duress. They are asking that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment call in the application for review. I should be grateful for my hon. Friend's comments on that point. I should be grateful also to hear his thinking about a waste disposal policy guidance note. This is an idea that has been mooted for quite some time.

Waste disposal is a controversial subject. Everyone admits that the waste must go somewhere, somehow, but no one wants it in his back yard. People today are rightly more environmentally conscious. But if the idea of distributing a planning policy guidance note is realised, it would offer clear guidance to both developers of waste

disposal sites and the planning authorities. It would certainly have prevented the tangle that has arisen in my constituency.

The planning policy guidance note would cover all forms of waste disposal, including incineration, landfill and recycling and would clarify the current planning guidance that is to be given for each option. As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, the Government have tabled amendments on waste disposal to the Planning and Compensation Bill. Those amendments will ensure that the county planning authorities prepare waste disposal development plans and thus ensure that there is a strategic plan for waste disposal in the county's boundaries. I understand that the Government place increasing emphasis on development plans as the framework within which individual planning applications should be considered. Where development plans provide a clear framework, they can reduce the controversy and delay that planning applications and appeals could face.

Of course, it is essential that the plans take into account the environmental protection waste disposal plans and establish land use policies and proposals for waste disposal which are consistent with the nature, quantity and distribution of waste, as forecast in the environment protection plan. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give some consideration to a waste disposal planning policy guidance note.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment can call in for review the proposal which has caused so much anxiety in my constituency. People simply cannot understand why an incinerator which is wanted only by Greater Manchester waste disposal authority can be foisted upon us because Trafford council made a serious mistake by granting outline planning permission way back in January 1988.

I must admit that I have been deeply disappointed by the attitude of Councillor Fogg, the Labour chairman of the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority. I received a letter from him dated 18 January 1991 in which he stated:

"I, and my colleagues on the GMWDA, are fully aware of the nature and the extent of the opposition to the clinical waste incinerator proposals. We have already had discussions with local residents, and their elected representatives, on a number of occasions and despite the evidence we have presented, it is regretted that local concern should still run high but in our view, much of that concern is misplaced. Having considered your request, I do not feel that there would be any benefit, for any party, if we arranged or participated in further meetings, at this stage.

Your letter raises a number of points on which I would wish to comment.

The issue of revocation of planning permission is a well-established legal principle and carries with it compensation provisions and rights in favour of the would-be developer. As the local planning authority, I am sure that Trafford Members are fully aware of these provisions when outline and detailed planning applications are presented to them for determination.

As far as criteria for siting incinerators are concerned, Trafford MBC intends to adopt the principle that incinerators should not be sited within 1,000 metres of the Borough's main residential areas. This principle has no technical foundation and has been adopted unilaterally by Trafford although, as the waste disposal authority, we have been invited to comment on the overall policy provisions. The monitoring and operation of the existing incinerator and the findings of the recent scientific investigation of dioxin levels in the vicinity of the plant do not support the justification for a 1,000 metre limit, nor does the evidence we submitted in support of our detailed planning proposals."

Later, he said:

"Our major regret has been the delay in reaching the present stage. The costs of the equipment and the civil and other associated works are likely to have risen by 30 per cent. since the original tenders were invited in 1988".

I hope that my hon. Friend can see from that the outlook of someone who feels that he has the whip hand. He has refused to listen to the local people. He has pooh-poohed the criteria that Trafford has adopted for the siting of incinerators. His major regret is that, because of opposition to his scheme, it will be more costly than he envisaged. He should be reminded that the health worries of local residents have not been allayed in any way by his bland assurances.

I trust that my hon. Friend can say something about how protection can be offered to my constituents whose concern I share. I am anxious to know whether the Department of the Environment has any powers to deal with a case like this. I hope that my hon. Friend can give me some reassurance in his reply.

1.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this important issue on the Adjournment. He is, as always, a tireless champion of the interests of his constituents and has, as ever, made his points extremely well, concisely, comprehensively and with considerable clarity. I will do my best to respond to his concerns and to the concerns of his constituents.

Waste is an inevitable product of our society, and how we dispose of it reflects on the quality of society. We may try to minimise the amount of waste that we produce and recycle as much as possible, but a substantial proportion will still remain, and we cannot avoid providing the necessary facilities properly to dispose of it. That applies just as much to clinical waste as to other types of waste. The issue which my hon. Friend has correctly identified is not therefore whether but how and where we should provide disposal facilities. I should like to deal with the "how" before coming on to consider the "where".

The majority of waste in this country is landfilled, and this remains an option for a good deal of clinical waste. However, certain types of clinical waste are not suitable for landfill, and it is not always practicable to separate such wastes from other clinical wastes. It has become normal practice to incinerate all clinical waste from hospitals—frequently on site in one of around 600 hospital incinerators. Most of these are fairly small, and many will have difficulty meeting the new European Community and Environmental Protection Act 1990 standards when they lose Crown exemption in April. Both the private sector and waste disposal authorities are, therefore, taking a greater interest in the provision of larger centralised facilities to serve a number of hospitals, and incorporating advanced incinerator techniques and standards.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with incineration as a method of waste disposal, provided that operating conditions and flue gas emissions are strictly controlled. Indeed, in many countries incineration is considered more environmentally acceptable than landfill for all types of waste, and is the predominant method of waste disposal.

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

It is clear that the public here are less favourably disposed towards incineration. They are understandably concerned about such things as possible emissions of dioxins and other pollutants. I am, therefore, glad to have the opportunity of reassuring my hon. Friend and his constituents that the new controls which we have introduced will set the highest and most rigorous standards for the incineration of all types of waste, and will ensure that incinerators—wherever they are located—present no danger to public health or the environment.

In future, the main controls will be applied through the provisions of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This applies a new system of integrated pollution control to all incinerators with a capacity of more than one tonne an hour and will come into effect from 1 April this year. Operators of such incinerators will be required to apply to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution for authorisation before the plant can commence operations, or whenever a substantial change is proposed. Those authorisations will specify the conditions under which plants must operate, including combustion conditions and appropriate techniques for controlling releases to air, water, or land. This integrated approach will ensure that all the environmental effects of a process are considered together. Operators will be required to use the best available techniques not entailing excessive costs to prevent and minimise toxic emissions, and to render harmless those emissions which cannot be prevented. The inspectorate is producing a series of guidance notes on best available techniques not entailing excessive costs, setting out the minimum standards that it expects plants to adopt, and these standards will be reviewed at least every four years.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the standards imposed under those arrangements will be extremely rigorous indeed and will in some cases go beyond the requirements of the new European Community directives on incinerator emissions. Dioxins—which are produced from the uncontrolled burning of plastic materials and which are perhaps the greatest concern—will have to be reduced to below the level at which they can be effectively measured. The Department of the Environment's pollution paper No. 27, "Dioxins in the Environment", published in 1989, pointed out that in well-managed incinerators emissions of dioxins were reduced to negligible levels—in fact, far below the background level in the atmosphere as a result of wood burning, car exhausts and so forth.

However, I fully appreciate that the imposition of high standards does not mean that we can ignore the siting of incinerators. No one wants an industrial plant sited near him, whatever its purpose. That is where the planning system comes in and, of course, no incinerator project can go ahead without planning permission.

Greater Manchester waste disposal authority's proposal for a clinical waste incinerator at Altrincham has gone through that process, and Trafford borough council has, as my hon. Friend mentioned, recently given planning permission for it to go ahead. Therefore, there is no locus for the Secretary of State to be involved. Planning permission has been granted and that is where the matter stands. I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to comment on that. Nevertheless, I understand that the proposed incinerator will have a capacity of more than 1 tonne per hour, so it follows that it will require authorisation from HMIP under the integrated pollution control arrangements before it can start operation.

To deal with individual planning applications for such facilities does present problems for local authorities, if they cannot be set into an overall strategy for dealing with waste in the area. That is why the Control of Pollution Act 1974 requires waste disposal authorities to draw up waste disposal plans to consider the amounts and types of waste arising in the area and the ways in which they will be disposed of. This enables authorities to assess the need for new facilities and the type of provision that should be made. Those powers have been strengthened under the Environmental Protection Act. However, the actual siting of facilities needs also to be considered in a planning framework. People will have more confidence that the right decisions have been taken if they can see that the options have been thoroughly investigated and the views of all the different interests have been fully taken into account.

We are making provision for that planning framework to be put in place. Only yesterday we moved amendments to the Planning and Compensation Bill in another place to require county councils in England, and district councils in Wales, to draw up planning policies for waste management and disposal. Those new waste local plans will set out authorities' detailed land use policies for the disposal and treatment of waste within the broad strategic framework provided by the county structure plan. They will ensure that planning authorities consider the land use implications of their waste policies from a strategic point of view rather than deciding applications in isolation. This will help authorites in deciding planning applications for new waste disposal facilities. And when applications go to appeal, or are called in by the Secretary of State, then the plans will provide better guidelines for the inspector. I believe that this will be of real benefit to the waste disposal industry. The planning process will be speeded up, and the industry will have guidance on the type and location of waste facilities that are likely to be acceptable in planning terms.

The new development plans will consider the need for sites and facilities in particular areas and the types of locations that are likely to be appropriate, as well as the planning criteria that would be expected to apply to such developments. Obviously the new waste disposal development plans will need to be consistent with the plans which authorities are already required to draw up under the Control of Pollution Act and Environmental Protection Act. We consulted interested parties on our proposals for waste development plans during the autumn, and I am pleased to say that there was a general welcome for them, both from the relevant planning authorities, and from the waste disposal industry.

My hon. Friend sensibly also suggested that there is a need for planning policy guidance on waste disposal facilities. We accept that there is a need for such guidance; and we made clear in the environment White Paper our intention to prepare new guidance on planning, pollution control and waste management. One of the issues that we shall certainly consider in the new guidance is the role of the new waste development plans and their relationship to pollution control in the light of the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act.

Work has started on the drafting of the planning policy guidance within my Department and our intention is to

publish a draft for public consultation later this year. We shall want to hear the views of all interested parties before preparing a final version of the guidance note.

I hope that I have managed to cover both the hows and wheres of waste incineration, and clinical waste incineration in particular. I hope that I have made clear to my hon. Friend that there is no scope for my Department to be involved in this matter, planning permission having been granted. Given the nature of the incinerator, however, the operators will be required to apply to HMIP for authorisation before the plant can commence operations. This authorisation will specify the conditions in which the plant must operate, including a host of conditions relating to appropriate techniques for controlling releases into the air, and so on. HMIP will want to consult on that. There is no reason why my hon. Friend should not approach HMIP to ensure that it is aware of his concerns and that those of his constituents are made clear.

I hope that I have also explained that there will be rapid changes in the legislative controls applied to waste management in the next few years. I hope that those changes will lead people to accept that incineration is a safe and viable option for waste disposal, and that the planning process will ensure that decisions are taken on a sensible strategic basis.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 31 January 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 7 February.

Mr. Speaker: As all the Second Reading Bills have blocking motions with the leave of the House I shall put them together.

AIRE AND CALDER NAVIGATION BILL *(By Order)*

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

HOOK ISLAND (POOLE BAY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *(By Order)*

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 7 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

2. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry about the public spending planning total for 1991-92.

4. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry about the public spending planning totals for 1991-92.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): None, Sir.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Chief Secretary aware that the Confederation of British Industry has been joined in its call for better training to eliminate the rigidities in our work force by the Employment Institute, the TUC and even the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development? Why are the Government ignoring the experts and planning real cuts in the Department of Employment budget in 1993-94?

Mr. Mellor: The recent CBI survey showed that three quarters of those asked were intending to spend as much on training next year as this year and that 29 per cent. were proposing to increase the money spent on training. The guarantees that the Government have given to various groups on training remain exactly as they were. In setting up training and enterprise councils and investing large sums of money in them, we have broadened the range of training and ensured that it reflects all the new insights into how to make it an effective way to get people into good, productive work.

Mr. Loyden: Is not it a fact that, in the traditions of the former Prime Minister, the present Government listen to no one? The CBI—the friends of the Government—has pointed out that rising unemployment and lack of quality training should be tackled at this stage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) said, despite those warnings, the Department of Employment is cutting its budget by £1 billion in 1993-94. Is that how the Government treat the question of quality training and unemployment?

Mr. Mellor: The Government have an unprecedented record of success in training. A wide range of training opportunities has been especially successful with young people and with the long-term unemployed, as the figures show only too clearly. I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment may have an early opportunity to lay before the House his training plans and when he does so it will be seen that the Government have one of the widest-ranging training plans anywhere in the world.

Mr. Tim Smith: As pressures mount on total public spending as a result of increased social security spending at home and the rising costs of the war in the Gulf, will my right hon. and learned Friend reaffirm the Government's

commitment to firm control of both public spending and public borrowing as part of their counter-inflationary policy?

Mr. Mellor: The outturn of public expenditure this year is likely to be only 1 per cent. ahead of plans, as was forecast in the autumn statement and, as is known, inflation was not accommodated in the public expenditure settlement in the autumn. So there is absolutely no doubt that, notwithstanding the obvious burdens caused by changes in the economic cycle and the cost of the Gulf, public expenditure is under firm control today and will continue to be so.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If my right hon. and learned Friend were to signal higher public spending, would not the discipline of his fiscal policy be questioned and might not sterling suffer? Would not the CBI do better to advocate radical changes to the habit of granting automatic annual pay increases, if it wishes to encourage profitability and more industrial investment?

Mr. Mellor: I agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's question, but in fairness to the CBI it is worth reporting that, in its memorandum on the economic priorities for 1991, it made it clear that tight control of public expenditure is vital. So it has no disagreement with us about that.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the Chief Secretary comment on recent reports of an average cut of some 12·5 per cent. in cash terms in the planning total for programmes for training the unemployed this year, just when the numbers are rising? Is not it at best short-sighted and at worst grossly neglectful of the national interest to cut training —and support for industry—at a time of recession?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Lady is simply asking me to reiterate points that I made earlier—which, of course, I am only too happy to do, unless the hon. Lady is overruled by the shadow Chancellor, who has already grasped the facts.

The CBI survey shows that there is considerable enthusiasm for enhanced training in British industry, which it is itself funding. As I said, the range of training that we provide is as sophisticated and wide ranging as can be found anywhere in the world, and the new TECs initiative has been widely welcomed everywhere except on the Opposition Front Bench.

Income Tax

3. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of income tax receipts came from the top 10 per cent. of earners in 1979, 1981 and 1990.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): The top 10 per cent. of taxpayers paid about 35 per cent. of the total yield of income tax in 1978-79 and 1981-82. That rose to 42 per cent. in 1990-91.

Mr. Bowis: Does not my hon. Friend's answer show that, as the Government's policy of reducing tax rates continues, those who can afford the most will bear the biggest share of the tax burden? Does not it also show that, as tax rates come down, tax revenue goes up, enabling us to afford to care for those in need, pay for better-quality services and cover eventualities and emergencies such as the Gulf war?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend puts the point very well. It is disturbing to find that—in the face of both the strong theoretical case that lower tax rates increase the yield of tax and the practical experience that demonstrates it conclusively—the Labour party still clings remorselessly to the old, faded dogmas of the past. Even as my hon. Friend asked his supplementary question, Labour voices could be heard saying, "There could be more: we could be raising more." I can tell the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that the one way to ensure that more money is not raised from the better off is to increase the high levels of tax levied on them.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister admit that, in the first 10 years of this Tory Government, the wealthiest 1 per cent. in Britain have received £26·2 billion in tax cuts, while the poor have been taxed to the hilt? Does not the Minister appreciate that that money should have been spent on hospitals, homes, education, pensions and on getting rid of cardboard city?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman simply has not been listening: if he had, he would have heard that the top 10 per cent. of taxpayers—those who are best off in society —have paid more and more in tax. They have also been allowed to keep more and I do not think that there is anything deplorable about that. The only argument for increasing tax rates for the better-off is based wholly on spite and envy; it is certainly not based on the desirability of increasing the yield to the Government.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister admit that the increase in Treasury revenue might have something to do with the fact that the rich—for example, the chief executives of our companies and industries—may just have been paying themselves more? For the past few years, they have been paying themselves 30 per cent. more each year, while the overwhelming majority in the country have received wage increases of less than 10 per cent.

Mr. Maude: Again we hear the old, faded voices calling for a return to the politics of spite and envy. British industry and British business are now vastly more successful, and have created much more wealth for everyone in society, than was the case before; if managers and executives have played an important part in that, I see nothing wrong with rewarding them.

Manufacturing Investment

5. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product manufacturing investment, including leased assets, represented in 1979; and what it represented in 1989.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The figures are 3·6 per cent. in 1979 and 2·8 per cent. in 1989, but this has to be seen against the background of the absolute level of manufacturing investment reaching an all-time high in real terms in the first quarter of 1990.

Mr. Jones: Will the Minister acknowledge that this is a worrying trend, despite the rider to her answer? Does she suggest that British industry will be able to cope when we come out of this appalling recession? If it is unable to cope, what is the balance of payments likely to be?

Mrs. Shephard: It is misleading to concentrate on just one sector, such as manufacturing. In advanced industrial economies all sectors of business are interdependent, The point is that the quality of investment is much better now than it was in the 1970s, when investment decisions were distorted by negative real interest rates and public sector subsidies. That improvement is demonstrated by the fact that profitability is now much higher than it was in the 1970s.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that many businesses in Yorkshire are anxiously looking for a reduction in interest rates? Is she also aware, however, that many manufacturing industries are so confident about the future that they are investing millions of pounds in new factories to prevent more imports from being sucked into this country?

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to hear that good news about Yorkshire. My hon. Friend well understands that the real threat to manufacturing is inflation and the important point is that interest rates are on course to reduce inflation.

Mr. John Smith: Is not it appalling that, as the economy plunges deeper into recession, the Confederation of British Industry predicts a 16 per cent. fall in investment by manufacturing companies? Why is it that Britain is the only country in the European Community that is suffering from such a disastrous fall in investment in its manufacturing sector? What do the Government intend to do about it?

Mrs. Shephard: The CBI forecast predicts a much sharper fall than do most other forecasts. A number of firms expect investment to drop markedly in 1991. That is to be expected after the record investment levels that were reached in early 1990. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will also have noticed from the 3i survey that 80 per cent. of the largest United Kingdom businesses think that business now is much better able to cope.

Mr. Roger King: Is my hon. Friend aware that when the Labour Government went out in 1979 so did Red Robbo, the Cowley mole and ancient and obsolete trade union practices? During the past 10 years there has been massive investment in the British motor industry by Nissan, Toyota and Honda, among others, leading to new factories, new plant and massive investment—a long-lasting testament to this Government's performance.

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is always an excellent advocate for the car industry. I am glad to be able to draw the attention of the House to the fact that in the fourth quarter of 1990 the volume of car exports increased by 37 per cent. compared with the previous year. The figures strikingly illustrate the strong improvement in the performance of the British car industry.

Child Benefit

6. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet representatives of the Equal Opportunities Commission to discuss child benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet representatives of the Equal Opportunities Commission in the near future.

Mr. Caborn: The Conservative party declares that it is the party of the family. Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer discuss child benefit with the Equal Opportunities Commission? Child benefit is one of the best fiscal ways to help families. Will the Government also discuss restoring the level of child benefit, in April 1991, to the operational level of April 1987? Will the Minister repudiate the Policy Studies Institute argument that child benefit should be removed from children over the age of five? May we have a Government commitment that the suggestion will not be considered by the Treasury?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to make any comment that might predict the content of the Budget. However, the Government have a two-pronged approach to help families with children through the social security system. There is child benefit, which will be costing £5 billion a year with effect from April with the extra £1 for the eldest child in each family, and special help targeted on poorer families which, at the moment, is £400 million a year extra in real terms and has been so since 1988. The real help for families with children has come from the strong growth in earnings that those families have seen under this Government.

Sir Robert McCrindle: As the Chancellor of the Exchequer is said to be under some pressure to restore child tax allowance, presumably in lieu of child benefit, will my hon. Friend remind him that we had the abolition of child tax allowance and transfer to child benefit some years ago because child benefit was thought to be the most effective way of bringing assistance to the maximum number of parents? Will she remind my right hon. Friend, if he is tempted to restore child tax allowance, that although it would no doubt benefit taxpayers, only the maintenance of child benefit and—one hopes—its restoration to its true level will continue to affect all families and all children within them?

Mrs. Shephard: Like the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), my hon. Friend is dangerously close to trying to get me to make some sort of Budget predictions. Perhaps I should remind my hon. Friend of the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security when he said to the House that child benefit is and will remain an important element in the Government's support for the family.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Government give careful consideration to the very real difficulties and problems created for families with young people beyond the age of 19 who are in full-time education? Will the Government reconsider the possibility of restoring child benefit to the end of the academic year in which the child reaches the age of 19 so that the hardship might be relieved?

Mrs. Shephard: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Savings

7. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates for the savings ratio.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): The latest figures show that the personal sector saving ratio was nearly 9 per cent. in the third quarter of 1990.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for the excellent news about savings going up. Does he agree that probably the best way to reduce inflationary pressures and interest rates is to encourage further spending—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—further savings? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's new TESSA scheme is probably the best form of saving and probably the best way of encouraging saving in the nation?

Mr. Lamont: I thought for a moment that my hon. Friend was announcing a novel fiscal principle, but I agree with his revised remarks. A high level of savings is extremely important for countering inflation. Of course, interest rates play an enormous part in balancing savings and investment. As my hon. Friend said, we have introduced a number of measures, including personal equity plans and TESSAs, which have been extremely popular and TESSAs have got off to an excellent start. I note what my hon. Friend said, but I cannot anticipate any further measures that might be in the Budget. I should tell the House that, as forecast in the press, the Budget will be on 19 March.

Mrs. Wise: As it is impossible for anyone to save without an income, what is the Chancellor's message to the 5,000 or so shop workers employed by Lewis's department stores who went to work this morning to find the doors closed for trading until further notice with no guarantee of wages after today?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this about savings?

Mrs. Wise: It is about savings and what comes before saving—eating. What will those shop workers hear from the Government about the state of the economy? What is the Chancellor's message to them?

Mr. Lamont: We have made it clear that we expect unemployment to rise this year, but it remains a fact that Britain has experienced fast growth in employment and that unemployment here is still much lower than the European average.

Mr. Hind: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of fighting inflation is to encourage people to save and that through TESSAs, PEPs and other measures the Treasury has encouraged that development? Will he continue to pursue that policy in the forthcoming Budget to help to press down inflation?

Mr. Lamont: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce), I note my hon. Friend's comments, which I assume are early Budget representations.

Ms. Abbott: We listened with much interest to what the Chancellor said about the savings ratio. In giving evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, Sir Jack Hibbert, director of the Central Statistical Office, said that the savings ratio is subject to quite a wide margin of error and that small differences from quarter to quarter should not be regarded as significant. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that savings are an important indicator of the economy? If he wants evidence of the Government's disastrous stewardship of the economy, he should consider the statistics on savings as a percentage of gross domestic product in the past 10 years which have halved—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading".]

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would help if the hon. Lady did not look at that bit of paper.

Ms. Abbott: Savings as a proportion of gross domestic product have halved in the past 10 years from 8·2 per cent. under the previous Labour Government to 4·6 per cent. in 1989.

Mr. Lamont: On the hon. Lady's point about the margin of what is statistically significant, the rate has increased from 5¼ per cent. to 9 per cent. in the third quarter of 1990 which is well outside what might be called the margin of error. She made a serious point—that for a long time Britain has been a low-savings country. One reason is that many people borrow to purchase houses. None the less, as my hon. Friends have said, the quite sharp rise in the savings ratio in the recent past has been extremely welcome.

Corporation Tax

8. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he can give of the amount of corporation tax he will collect from private companies in the current tax year.

Mr. Maude: Corporation tax was estimated in the autumn statement to yield £21·2 billion in 1990-91. I am afraid that information on the yield from private companies is not available.

Mr. Gill: In framing his Budget proposals, will my hon. Friend take into account the desirable and beneficial effect on the economy of allowing successful companies to retain more of their earnings, which would inevitably be spent on research and development, training and more capital investment? Will he further bear it in mind that the ploughed-back profits of private companies are inevitably their only source of capital?

Mr. Maude: Our rates of corporation tax are already exceptionally low, which is helpful to the corporate sector. Our regime for small companies is the most generous in the industrialised world. My hon. Friend will have been encouraged by the survey published by the CBI this week, which shows that a majority of companies expect to maintain or increase expenditure on training and to maintain expenditure on research and development. That is particularly encouraging because in the downturn of the early 1980s those two items were the first to be cut.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) was at least partly right. Companies that intend to use their money for investment should be given some incentive. Should not that incentive be a change in the capital allowances? This is a period in which there will be some disinvestment. It falls to the Chancellor to ensure that at such a critical time, investment is maintained as far as possible. The 25 per cent. capital allowances level is nonsense.

Mr. Maude: All the evidence suggests that the 25 per cent. capital writedown reflects the real depreciation in the

value of investment. If anything, it is more generous than the economic assessment of the depreciation. The Opposition have maintained for a long time—and I agree with this—that spending on research and development, and on training is an investment as well, so we should seek to maintain spending there. I am less gloomy than the right hon. Gentleman seems to be and I draw great comfort from the indications in the Confederation of British Industry survey.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend examine the amount raised by corporation tax over the past few years and will he reflect that the vastly increased amounts raised are a result of the successful way in which the Government have run their economic policies and of the great expansion of British industry? Nevertheless, in framing his Budget, will my hon. Friend take into account the fact that the successes of the past are now resulting in considerable corporation tax having to be paid at a time of cash flow difficulties and the fact that too much tax paid to the Government will have an effect on investment? Perhaps my hon. Friend and his colleagues will consider reducing the rate of corporation tax for private companies in the forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Maude: I hear what my hon. Friend says. He would not, of course, expect me to anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the very desirable increased profitability of the corporate sector in recent years, which is a reflection of the considerable success of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Minister's own Department estimates that some £5 billion of tax, including corporation tax, remained uncollected last year. What plans does the Minister have to collect that tax? What proportion of it is corporation tax? What is the Minister going to do to block tax-planning devices, such as those that the Conservative Government introduced in the Finance Act 1981, because the burdens fall on the rest of our citizens?

Mr. Maude: The short point is that the best way to prevent tax avoidance is to have a tax system that is simple and straightforward and has low rates. We have pursued that policy and, especially with corporation tax, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, it has resulted in a substantial increase in yield. We are keen at every stage to ensure that loopholes are blocked and that avoidance is prevented. We shall continue to pursue those aims.

Mr. John Townend: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the small business sector, cash flow is becoming very difficult? Will he, therefore, when framing his Budget, consider making the first £1,000 of taxable profit in unincorporated businesses and in businesses paying the small business rate exempt from corporation tax, to help their cash flow?

Mr. Maude: I have taken careful note of my hon. Friend's suggestion and I shall study it with great diligence.

Interest Rates

9. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current short-term interest rates in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* West Germany.

Mr. Norman Lamont: At close yesterday, three-month interbank market rates were 13·9 per cent. in the United Kingdom and 9·2 per cent. in Germany. However, today the Bundesbank has raised its official discount and Lombard rates by a further ½ per cent.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Chancellor agree that any neutral observer hearing those figures for the first time would assume that Germany was the country with oil? After 12 oil-rich years and with sky-high interest rates, sky-high mortgage arrears, sky-high repossessions and sky-high bankruptcies is not it time that the Government broke the habit of the past 12 long years and apologised to the electorate?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman might also have referred to the fact that in the 1980s, the British economy grew faster than the Germany economy. He seemed to leave that out of his comparison between this country and Germany. I appreciate that interest rates are high and that that is causing great difficulties for many businesses. However, the discomfort for the business sector is inevitable if we are to get on top of inflation. Inflation, especially for businesses in the international market which compete against German businesses, matters too. Businesses will not be able to compete against Germany unless we get inflation down to levels far closer to Germany's.

Sir Peter Tapsell: In view of today's raising of the discount rate by the Bundesbank, can we politely make representations to the Bundesbank and the German Government, as I assume we already have, explaining that, while we fully appreciate the great burden on them posed by the economic refurbishment of eastern Germany, we very much hope that they will seek to deal with this by fiscal rather than monetary methods? If they continue to raise their interest rates it will cause considerable problems for partners of theirs in the exchange rate mechanism and, indeed, possibly have an adverse effect on both American and Japanese interest rates as well.

Mr. Lamont: As my hon. Friend would expect, we have discussed the question of the German deficit and the financial consequences of the unification of Germany both at the G7 meeting and at the recent meeting of EC Finance Ministers. The Germans have made it very clear that they understand our concerns and, most important, that they intend to limit their budget deficit and to make the expenditure and tax adjustments necessary so to do.

Mr. Beith: Does the Chancellor agree that if it were widely believed that the Government were on course to defeat inflation the pound would not be so low in its exchange rate bands and the Chancellor would find it much easier to narrow the gap with regard to German interest rates? Are not our present penally high interest rates a premium for the Government's past mistakes?

Mr. Lamont: Exchange rate markets—although I may be overstating the hon. Gentleman's influence—are also influenced by endless calls for premature cuts in interest rates. No, I do not agree with what the hon. Gentleman says. Indeed, I think that it is very clear from looking at outside forecasts that people expect us to reach our inflation target and many independent forecasters think that we may do rather better.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the determination by the British Government to hold to the central rate within the ERM will increase the confidence of the holders of sterling in continuing to hold sterling and therefore allow a lower rate of premium for sterling interest rates against those of the deutschmark? Is not this the most virtuous way of ensuring that our rates will fall as inflation falls?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We all knew what the consequences would be when we chose to join the exchange rate mechanism and I assume that right hon. and hon. Gentlemen who urged us to join were also aware of the consequences. Our overwhelming priority must be to stick within the bands of the ERM, but it is true that, as the underlying rate of inflation is seen to come down, so the scope for interest rate reductions may become wider.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Chancellor accept that, even with this morning's announcement from Germany, our interest rates are still very substantially above those elsewhere in Europe? Will the Government finally wake up to the fact that their policy of exclusive reliance on high interest rates for demand management has succeeded in plunging this country into recession, starving industry of investment funds and ensuring that our economic performance has been far worse than Germany's?

Mr. Lamont: I do not see how the hon. Gentleman can say that our economic performance has been worse than that of Germany when our growth rate, our manufacturing output performance and our manufacturing investment in the recent past have all grown faster than those of Germany. As regards the hon. Gentleman's last point, I do not understand why he persists in saying that we rely only on interest rates when we have one of the tightest fiscal positions of any of the G7 countries. As regards the hon. Gentleman's first point, our interest rates are higher than those of Germany because our inflation rate is higher. Our real rates of interest, which measure the real burden on industry, are not higher than those of France, Germany or, indeed, Italy.

Manufacturing Productivity

10. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much manufacturing productivity has increased between 1979 and 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Manufacturing productivity increased by 50 per cent. between 1979 and 1989, more than in any other major industrial country over the period in question.

Mr. Wells: Does my hon. Friend agree that that performance shows the success of the Conservative Government's economic policies? Will not we need more and a longer period of such Conservative Government policies now that we have joined the European exchange rate mechanism, because manufacturers can no longer take refuge in a devaluation of our exchange rate and must increase their productivity still further?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Manufacturing output, employment and the number of firms reached record levels in 1990. Membership of the ERM is an additional discipline.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is not it the case that our manufacturing production will go down if ICI leads the fertiliser business? That is likely simply because of dogma. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has blocked Kemira, a state-owned company, from taking over the fertiliser business owned by ICI. Is not that a disgrace when we remember that, in my constituency of Edinburgh, Leith and south of the border, many people are likely to lose their jobs? What does the Minister intend to do about that, remembering that a fight-back will take place and that a general election is just around the corner?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman raises a matter which, as he recognises, is more properly for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, I make the general point that an increase in unemployment depends crucially on how companies and labour forces split an essential reduction in unit labour costs between pay settlements, lower investment and fewer jobs.

Mr. Favell: As it is clear that the social charter would have an adverse effect on manufacturing productivity, may I have my hon. Friend's cast-iron assurance that the Government will not give in to Commissioner Papandreou and agree to the social charter?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government will continue to pursue the prudent and sensible economic policies that have brought so much success over the past decade.

Mr. Bosteng: Given the current state of the Government's economic policies and their perverse and asinine equation of working with hurting, how many people have to be flung out of work before Ministers go to the Dispatch Box to tell us that their economic policies are working—2 million or 2·5 million? Have they any idea?

Mrs. Shephard: The real threat to employment and to economic success is inflation. I repeat my point that the increase in unemployment will depend crucially on the way in which management and labour forces deal with wage settlements. We do not need any lectures from the Opposition when we remember that manufacturing output under Labour fell by 2½ per cent.

Mr. Bill Walker: Did my hon. Friend notice that, in 1979, Scotland's premier exporting industry, the Scotch whisky industry was in recession? It was overstocked and underproducing, while distilleries and bottling and blending plants were closing. Today Scotch whisky exports are at an all-time high and that is the direct result of the Government's policies.

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Scotch whisky industry has had remarkable success. It now exports 85 per cent. of what it produces. That is in large measure due to its own efforts and the Government's successful policies and support.

Income Tax

11. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on Government revenues of a 1p cut in the basic rate of tax.

Mr. Maude: About £2 billion in a full year.

Dr. Godman: I know that the Chancellor is a bit of a chancer, but may I urge him to resist taking the main

chance offered by such a tax cut? Will he instead provide more expenditure for the training of our actual and potential work force? Would not such expenditure enable many unemployed people to aspire to skills and knowledge that would put them in a better position in the labour market?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman makes his Budget representations in a somewhat delphic way. In response to his point about spending money on training, I mentioned earlier, and repeat for his benefit, that the CBI survey indicates that the amount of money spent by private companies on training is likely to be increased or maintained this year. The majority of companies are expecting to increase the amount that they spend on training. That is good news. We have already a massive programme of training in Britain, which is very much to be welcomed.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my hon. Friend resist this year the urge to raise taxes, particularly on savings? Would not the Opposition's suggestion of reintroducing the investment income surcharge discourage savings? Does not that show how little the Opposition's underlying attitudes have changed, whatever their glossy image is?

Mr. Maude: The idea propounded by the Labour party that one should at the same time encourage savings and tax them more heavily is one which I have not yet managed to understand.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Mr. Patchett: Has the Prime Minister seen reports this morning that the Italian cargo vessel the Karin B is returning to Britain with a cargo of toxic waste? In view of the grave public anxiety on the matter, will he ensure that under no circumstances will the ship be allowed into any British port with its deadly cargo?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that waste will be allowed into this country only if it is safe to treat it. We shall certainly apply that principle to the Karin B and its cargo.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that in the nuclear weapons age the much pilloried phrase, "Careless talk costs lives" is a dramatic understatement? Does he further agree that the intolerable position in which Admiral Sir Tom Woodward was put in a public discussion on television early yesterday morning by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was a serious threat, especially as the right hon. Gentleman asked that the relationship between the President of the United States and British use of nuclear weapons be brought out into the open? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that shows the importance of the existing convention which applies to the matter?

The Prime Minister: It is an important convention. However, I did not see the interview and I should prefer not to comment too directly upon it.

Mr. Benn: Is the Prime Minister aware that Admiral Woodward was a great deal more candid than Ministers have been about the use of nuclear weapons in the Gulf? Is he also aware that there is widespread anxiety in Britain about the extension of the war aims well beyond the United Nations objectives relating to Kuwait and about the possibility of an extension of the war? Will he welcome the initiative of the French Government in going to Tehran to see whether at this late stage some progress might be made by negotiation leading to a ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that I did not see the interview with Admiral Woodward and I have no comment on it. On the war aims, I have made it clear consistently that our aims are those set out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. That is and remains the position.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to consider the somewhat fragile political climate in South Africa, following the welcome meeting of reconciliation between Chief Buthelezi and Mr. Nelson Mandela? What action can the Government take to encourage the nations of the world to take a more positive attitude towards South Africa to encourage that country faster and further down the road to reform which we all want to see it travel?

The Prime Minister: I very much welcome the meeting between Chief Buthelezi and Mr. Mandela. It is an extremely welcome development. As my hon. Friend will know, the European Community nations lifted the investment sanction some time ago because of the progress that has been made. If, as I hope, further progress on dismantling apartheid is made soon, I hope that we shall see a further gesture from the European Community, the United States and the Commonwealth on lifting sanctions.

Q2. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir David Steel: After the Gulf war, bearing in mind what was done after the Falklands war, will the Prime Minister consider setting up a high-level inquiry into the acquisition by Iraq of British arms and technology, including some from private companies, quangos and Government Departments, so that lessons may be learned, and so that never again will our forces be faced with an enemy armed partly by ourselves?

The Prime Minister: There is a considerable degree of sensitivity about the supply of arms and equipment. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, for some considerable time we have not supplied arms to Iraq for precisely that reason. We will take great care in future to ensure that we are careful about that matter.

Sir Jim Spicer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the record of loyalty and service to NATO of the republic of Turkey in the last 45 years, and also to the United Nations in Korea and to United Nations endeavours in the Gulf, is worthy of great praise and should be considered carefully by other NATO members and members of the European Community?

The Prime Minister: Turkey certainly has a distinguished record in NATO, and I am happy to acknowledge that fact.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to confirm that any interest rate rise in Britain in response to today's rise in German interest rates would be disastrous for industry?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we will set interest rates and reduce interest rates when we think it is appropriate. As he knows, we have made our position on the subject perfectly clear. When it is appropriate and in the interests of the economy to reduce interest rates, and when we see that the reduction will be sustained, we will take action.

Mr. Kinnock: The Government have been telling us for years that they have been curing inflation. Is not it the case that they have always made the mistake of combating inflation only with high interest rates, with the result that they have hit investment? How does the Prime Minister expect the country to become more competitive in advance of the completion of the single market if all the time he is wearing down investment, skills, training and the other things that are essential to enable Britain to compete?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should know that as our inflation differential with the European Community narrows, we will be in a position to reduce interest rates. The right hon. Gentleman, who invariably advocates the cutting of interest rates, may recall that he also advocated a further cut in interest rates in 1987. Had we then followed his advice, we would have faced a far greater problem today.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister will have great difficulty in saying to anyone that he could have greater difficulties than those caused by 1,000 redundancies a day, a reduction in output, a reduction in investment and the highest interest rates in the developed world.

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is serious about Britain's success in the 1990s, he needs to bear it in mind that we must get inflation down to the rate of our competitors. We are prepared to take action to do so. I regret that the right hon. Gentleman, as ever, wants the soft option.

Q3. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the contribution made by Germany yesterday to Britain's war expenses is extremely welcome? Can he indicate to the House whether he expects contributions from any other source?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the further contribution of £275 million from Germany is very welcome. So also is the offer to provide some military material. I spoke to Chancellor Kohl this morning and was able to thank him for the generosity of the German people.

Mrs. Heal: Following the visit yesterday by hon. Members, all of whom happened to be women, to the wives of the service men serving in the Gulf, will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to write a letter of support to the wives, many of whom feel isolated and lonely? Will he agree to do that? Will he also agree to a delegation of the wives coming to Westminster to explain to hon. Members their difficulties and feelings while they are supporting their husbands who are serving in the Gulf?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady about the remarkable contribution made by the wives of our service men. I hope shortly to have the opportunity of visiting a number of the wives in Germany and I look forward to that. I would be happy to send the letter that the hon. Lady suggests.

Q4. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there can be few worse examples of the inhumanity of Saddam Hussein than his cruelty to the prisoners of war and their families in refusing the International Red Cross access to them? Will he do everthing in his power to ensure that that access is achieved?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that we are certainly doing that. The action by the Iraqis in refusing access is intolerable and unforgivable. We are in daily touch with the Red Cross in Geneva and are doing our best to support its efforts. I shall be meeting the president of the Red Cross early next week.

Q5. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lewis: Does the Prime Minister share my view that it is obscene that the lives of coalition forces in the Gulf are threatened by arms and weapons probably made by their own families in their own country? Will the right hon. Gentleman give an unequivocal assurance today that he will take Britain out of the international arms trade, which includes the training of personnel from other countries and providing technical know-how?

The Prime Minister: The obscenity lies in Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and the sooner that the hon. Gentleman recognises that the better.

Q6. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was an act of naked aggression, but Israel's occupation of the west bank and Gaza was brought about by decades of Arab intolerance of the state of Israel and that, because of those two different scenarios, there should be no linkage at any future date?

The Prime Minister: It is clear that the situation is different because in 1967 it was Israel which was attacked. But we now have to look to the future and a solution to the Arab-Israel problem based on territory for peace. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait has made that task much

more difficult, but as I have said to the House on a number of occasions in recent weeks, we shall certainly be looking to see whether we can bring that peace forward as soon as the conflict is over.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Prime Minister share my admiration for the prompt response of senior members of the Commonwealth to the invasion of Kuwait? Does he share my hope that those ties with the Commonwealth will endure long after various temporary entanglements have disappeared?

The Prime Minister: I most certainly do, without qualification.-

Q7. **Mr. Thorne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thorne: As justice delayed is justice denied, will my right hon. Friend, in his usual caring fashion, be kind enough to examine the efficiency of the courts and whether it is right that people, particularly from abroad, should be obliged to wait so long for their trial? I am thinking in particular of Mrs. Dina Le Tarle, the American wife of a surgeon, aged 29, who has been prosecuted for her actions while responding to muggers on the underground. She has now been waiting three months for her trial——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the case is sub judice, the hon. Gentleman should bear that in mind.

The Prime Minister: I understand the general point that my hon. Friend makes. The Government are concerned to reduce to a minimum delay in all criminal cases.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Prime Minister will know that many of the soldiers who are serving well in the Gulf are in the Army because they could not get jobs in civvy street and when the Gulf war is over there will be soldiers who, unfortunately, will be unfit for Army service. Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee them jobs in Glasgow and the north of England?

The Prime Minister: The early part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be widely resented by many of our forces in the Gulf. I heard from him no talk of employment during the 40 successive months when unemployment was falling.

Q8. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend is hearing from those who wish to see extensions to the sanction period in respect of the Gulf calls to bring about a ceasefire. For the benefit of the House, will my right hon. Friend surmise why those people are trying to put our troops in extra danger by giving Saddam Hussein the breathing space to develop a nuclear weapon?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. He makes a valid point. We are not interested in a pause or a ceasefire, which would simply enable Iraq to regroup, resupply its forces and place our troops in greater peril. The conflict over Kuwait will be concluded only when all the provisions of Security Council resolution 678 have been met.

The Gulf

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Gulf conflict and various matters arising therefrom.

The allied campaign to liberate Kuwait was launched two weeks ago. The initial aim was to establish air supremacy and then sufficiently to reduce the military capability of the Iraqis' armed forces so that the liberation of Kuwait will be successfully achieved with the minimum of casualties to our forces.

During this first period more than 30,000 allied sorties have been flown against what were initially substantial air defences. From those 30,000 sorties, 19 aircraft have not returned—of which five were British. The House knows of those most regrettable losses in the first week, but will be pleased to note that no British aircraft have been lost in the past week. That pleasure is combined with the deepest admiration for the skill and courage of our aircrews and of all the allies at the way in which they have sustained the vital air campaign. The initial denial to the Iraqis of the use of their airfields, in which the Tornados played such a critical part, the progressive suppression of their ground air defences, in which the Jaguars have been very active, and the shooting down of their aircraft seeking combat have enabled air supremacy to be achieved, so that hardened aircraft shelters and other military and strategic targets can be progressively attacked. That supremacy has been underlined by the sudden departure of about 100 Iraqi aircraft to Iran.

The achievements of the air campaign so far include the destruction of all nuclear reactor capacity and of about half Iraq's biological and chemical production; substantial damage to military fuel and ammunition stores; the putting out of action of a number of airfields; major damage to command and control facilities; the loss of centralised control of air defences; the progressive reduction of Scud launch capability; and the hitting of 22 bridges to inhibit the resupply of Iraqi forces in Kuwait.

However, substantial as those achievements are, I must warn the House that so vast is the Iraqi military capacity that it is likely to be some time yet before it will be sufficiently reduced for the allies to proceed with the liberation of Kuwait.

In that connection, we have received a request from the United States Government for a limited number of B52s to be temporarily based at RAF Fairford to undertake missions with conventional munitions against Iraqi military or strategic targets that are supporting the continuing Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. RAF Fairford is an established forward-operating base for B52s, and the Government have readily agreed to the request.

At sea, while the allied navies have been much involved since August in enforcing the embargo, it is only in the last few days that there has been any significant action against the Iraqi navy. In those engagements, in which Royal Navy Lynx helicopters and RAF Jaguars played an important role, 10 Iraqi patrol boats and minesweepers were sunk, and up to a further 25 damaged. A number of those vessels had an Exocet capability. Those naval encounters frustrated what may have been an amphibious attack designed to coincide with the land attack at Khafji that occurred yesterday.

In respect of the 1st Armoured Division, the continuing delivery of supplies is further enhancing its battle-ready capability.

The House will be aware that we are now starting to hold a number of Iraqi prisoners of war. I reaffirm that they will be held in strict conformity with the requirements of the Geneva convention. That is our absolute commitment and we insist on those requirements being observed by the Government of Iraq as well. The parade of captured aircrew on television is in total breach of the convention—as would be any detention of them at strategic sites. I regret to inform the House that the International Committee of the Red Cross has still not even been informed of the names of any prisoners, let alone been granted the access to which it is entitled. That inhuman treatment of the prisoners is causing great distress and the thoughts of us all are with their families—as is our admiration for their courage and steadfastness at such a difficult time. I confirm that we are making the strongest representations to the Red Cross and the Iraqi authorities for our concerns to be met.

I refer next to our strengths in the Gulf. At the start of operations, we committed some 35,000 service men and women. We have since strengthened some units already deployed. Three additional battalions are being deployed to fulfil our obligations to any prisoners of war. With the extra Buccaneers that I announced on 25 January, total United Kingdom personnel now committed will rise to about 42,000.

The full operating costs in 1990-91 now total more than £1·25 billion, excluding the cost of any replacement of lost equipment and of munitions used, which so far totals nearly £200 million. The daily operating cost has risen to more than £4 million.

In connection with those costs, I very much welcome the announcement by the German Government of a contribution of a further 800 million deutschmarks to our costs. We are very hopeful of other contributions from our friends and allies in support of our efforts in support of the United Nations.

As to matters of particular interest to our forces and their families, there have been complaints over difficulties in the availability at post offices of the very popular air letter—the bluey—and steps have been taken that I hope have dealt with their problem.

Some hon. Members told me of service families being charged normal international airmail rates for sending parcels to the Gulf. I am pleased to announce that, from tomorrow, the Post Office is suspending the use of normal airmail rates for any parcels sent to BFPO addresses in the Gulf. All will be charged at the normal United Kingdom inland parcel rate. That clear instruction should end any confusion at post office counters.

The telephone service that we installed with the help of British Telecom and Mercury has been very popular, but it is obviously somewhat expensive. We therefore propose to subsidise calls for all service personnel from the Gulf, on a basis similar to that for forces in Northern Ireland. The value of that subsidy will be up to £10 a month—affecting, for example, five three-minute calls at half price. Many of our forces are not in early reach of a telephone kiosk at the moment, but their entitlement under that scheme will be accumulated for later use.

The House can be proud of the way in which the armed forces are contributing to the multinational effort. They have made an excellent start and, thankfully, losses have

been few. However, there is some way to go yet, and there may be setbacks and at times unwelcome news. None the less, I have no doubt of the determination of the House and the country to give our forces the support that they need to bring their task to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and I think that the whole House would want to join in his tribute to the courage and skill which have been displayed by our airmen during the past two weeks, and to join him in noting that there have been no casualties and no losses to the air force during the past week. We also join him in deploring the Iraqi authorities' failure to intimate to the International Committee of the Red Cross the identity of prisoners and those people whom it is alleged have been detained at militarily sensitive locations.

We also note what the Secretary of State said about basing B52s at Fairford. Perhaps he could tell us why Britain was chosen and which, if any, other European countries have agreed to participate. We also note from his statement that the United States has not employed the normal "neither confirm nor deny" formula in respect of nuclear devices and that no nuclear air-launched cruise missiles will be carried by these aeroplanes. Will he also confirm that the aircraft will be based at Fairford only for the duration of the conflict?

We join the Secretary of State in expressing our appreciation for the German donation to the war effort. Which other countries have been approached for contributions?

We note the attempt to resolve the problem of telephone calls, but how does that facility compare with that afforded by AT and T to United States troops in the Gulf?

In his statement the Secretary of State mentioned the town of Khafji. Will he tell us more about the circumstances surrounding the liberation of that town, the casualties involved and what prisoners have been taken? Could he enlighten the House as to what military use the town of Khafji would have been to the Iraqis and whether he has any inkling of the idea behind the attack? Will he also give us some information about the latest developments regarding polluting of the Gulf by the Iraqis releasing oil? What is happening there?

Can the Secretary of State give any information to the House about reporters' access to troops, because journalists in Scotland have made a number of complaints about their inability to gain access to the Scottish regiments, which account for some 40 per cent. of the troops in the Gulf?

Mr. King: I thank the hon. Member for his general welcome and the support that he gave on behalf of his right hon. and hon. Friends.

I certainly confirm that the application in respect of the B52s is temporary, and that we have an absolute assurance that they will use only conventional munitions when operating from that base, which is important. Other countries will be assisting with the successful deployment of B52s in various ways and one other country will be involved in basing, but I think that it will shortly be making its own announcement and the hon. Member will forgive me if I do not anticipate it.

The contribution from Germany is certainly very much appreciated. I would rather not say which other countries we might be approaching. I am glad to say that some of our friends and allies are approaching us. There is widespread recognition of the world community wishing to make its contribution to the multinational effort in whichever way it feels appropriate.

The hon. Member mentioned telephones and several other hon. Members were shouting about that during my statement. It needs to be considered seriously. The Americans tried to introduce and had a trial of a free system. The problem was that people who were able to use it used it all the time and it broke down. There was much more criticism because people could not then have access to the limited lines and facilities that exist. It is my understanding that the Americans have now returned to a form of subsidised system.

We try to tackle the problems. An important point that we have to tackle is that many of the people whom we are trying to help are not trying to telephone this country from the Gulf; they are trying to telephone Germany. I am glad to say that, under an arrangement that we have made—I understand that it has not yet been possible for the Americans to match it—people will be able to telephone from the Gulf to Germany for the same subsidised low price as it would cost them to telephone this country. That is, I think, significantly better than what other countries have been able to do.

I can confirm that, according to my understanding, Prince Khalid has announced that Khafji is now clear of the intruders, and I am sure that we welcome the defeat of that incursion. Although there was a further oil discharge, and it was clear that the Iraqis were actively discharging and pumping oil into the Gulf, the latest information that I have received—uncorroborated, but believed to be true—suggests that it has now ceased.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): The whole House will wish to join my right hon. Friend in expressing its utter disgust at the way in which prisoners of war have been treated by the Iraqi authorities. Will my right hon. Friend, however, press the International Committee of the Red Cross rather harder to speak out robustly about what it knows to be the correct conditions, so that the relatives of prisoners of war can be assured not only that we are doing all that we can—which, frankly, is very little—but that the ICRC is, too? Will my right hon. Friend also say a little more about the arrangements that he has made in the Ministry of Defence to keep relatives up to date with the current position?

Mr. King: In answer to the latter question, let me say that we are operating a round-the-clock contact service, and are trying to provide as much information as we can about these difficult matters. As my hon. Friend will know, we are maintaining very close contact with the services welfare organisations to ensure that that is done effectively.

We are bringing to bear all possible pressure and influence on the ICRC. An ICRC medical team is now going to Baghdad and we hope that it will be able to carry the work forward. The president of the ICRC is coming to see my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister next week.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): May I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, associate myself with the Secretary of State's observations about the

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

performance of our troops, especially that of the RAF pilots flying the ground attack version of the Tornado, whose bravery has been exemplary?

My hon. Friends and I accept that the deployment of B52s at RAF Fairford is justified if its purpose is to shorten the war and to reduce allied casualties. Does the right hon. Gentleman understand, however, that some people may be concerned about the deployment and will he take this opportunity of letting the people of the United Kingdom further into his confidence and explaining a little more clearly the current operational requirements for that deployment?

Mr. King: I am grateful for what the hon. and learned Gentleman said and especially grateful for his support of the RAF contribution to the campaign. The House will share his views.

I am also grateful for the hon. and learned Gentleman's clarification, on behalf of his right hon. and hon. Friends, of the position regarding the B52s. We want the conflict to end at the earliest possible time. Criticisms have been made of B52s in the past, but they have a precision bombing capability and they will be deployed against military and strategic targets to accelerate the end of the conflict and the liberation of Kuwait. That is clearly part of the purpose. B52s are already deployed in a number of airfields, but there is no further capacity there. It was necessary to increase the capacity and that is why the further requests have been made.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): The German Government's contribution to the cost of the war is welcome, but should not account also be taken of the fact that the British taxpayer is at the same time making a substantial contribution to the cost of German unification? More important, does my right hon. Friend agree that the making of a series of ad hoc lump-sum payments to finance the war is not a satisfactory arrangement? The war may go on for a considerable time. What is needed is a general assessment relating to the international community, on a percentage or other basis, so that the burden can be fairly shared among all who will gain from the defeat of aggression.

Mr. King: I note my right hon. Friend's comments and understand the thoughts behind them. Costs have increased sharply due to the conflict, which has led to a loss of equipment and ammunition. Moreover, we have a large number of men and women out there. We are very grateful for the support that we have received, but it would be more satisfactory if it were on a slightly more regular basis. I shall certainly think about my right hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to the ICRC and the Geneva convention. It is absolutely essential that all those involved in the conflict should stay within the terms of the United Nations resolutions and the Geneva convention. The same criterion must be extended to our allies. Will the Secretary of State therefore discuss with his Israeli counterparts the treatment that they are handing out to the 1·7 million Palestinians on the west bank and Gaza? They are not observing the Geneva convention, particularly when it comes to the 24-hour curfew that they have imposed on the west bank and Gaza and the recent arrest of Sari Husseibh. May I ask him to raise these matters with his Israeli counterpart and to say whether the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been able to find out whether Her Majesty's Government have spare gas masks that could be given to the Israeli Government for use by the Palestinians?

Mr. King: I have not met my Israeli opposite number, as the hon. Gentleman puts it, but I shall certainly ensure that his comments are conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary because I understand the strength of feeling about these issues.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): As the Father of the House, may I put to my right hon. Friend a simple request: to convey to the pilots and aircrew in the Gulf our great admiration of their courage, steadfastness and professional skill?

Mr. King: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, who occupies his position with such dignity. I shall certainly ensure that the message is conveyed.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Yesterday we saw Iraqi tanks apparently pretending to surrender in order to mount an attack. Oil has deliberately been pumped into the waters of the Gulf. We have seen missile attacks on Israeli cities and the misuse of allied prisoners of war. Does not all that demonstrate that Saddam Hussein has no intention of fighting this war under any sort of Marquess of Queensberry rules? Has that lesson now been learnt by the allied military commanders and will they plan accordingly?

Mr. King: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting in any way that we should walk away from the standards and codes of practice and behaviour that he would expect us to follow and we have no intention of doing so. The matters that he has rightly drawn to the attention of the House confirm what so many of us feel so strongly: that this cause, now embarked on, has to be seen through and that everything that has happened since shows what a very evil and monstrous military regime exists in Iraq.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the part of the UN resolution that authorises the current action and calls for the restoration of peace and security in the region also authorises, if necessary, the invasion of Iraq in order to destroy Saddam Hussein and his war machine?

Mr. King: The issue of resolution 678 is one which, I am glad to say, is now being seriously addressed by a lot of people. I put it most simply: there is no point in seeking to achieve the liberation of Kuwait if Kuwait cannot stay liberated. The answering of that question deserves—not in slogans, nor by attempting to accuse some people of bellicosity or aggression—very serious consideration. That is precisely why, in its good sense, the United Nations put that point in the resolution. How it is going to be achieved—whether by economic sanctions or by military action—will depend on how the situation develops. But let there be no doubt that it would betray—as I have said on another occasion—all those who are prepared to risk their lives in this conflict if we settled for some halfway solution, only to have to return to the problem in a year's time.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Is not the reason for so many telephone calls to Germany from our forces in the Gulf the fact that many of their wives are in Germany? Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that they are under great strain and that they are bearing it very bravely? Will he assure the House and the country that everything possible is being done to sustain and support those ladies?

Mr. King: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said because that is precisely the point. May I also express my appreciation to her and other hon. Members, some of whom have been to visit the wives in Germany. We must be very conscious of the fact that it is one thing for the wife of a service man if her husband goes to the conflict in the Gulf, but if that wife is herself in a foreign country, albeit an ally, it is a double separation. I am grateful for the interest taken by hon. Members and for what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The whole House will support what the Secretary of State said about the treatment of our prisoners of war. I want to put to him a delicate point which I hope will not be misunderstood as a sign of weakness. Because my support for the troops is so strong, I hope that I will not be misunderstood. The prisoners of war are entitled to proper treatment under the Geneva convention as of right and the Secretary of State is right to stress that to the Red Cross. At the same time, I believe that we should consider sending humanitarian aid to Iraqi children and sick people. That is not irreconcilable with fighting a strong war and may help our prisoners of war.

Mr. King: We have the greatest human sympathy for the suffering of many of the Iraqi people at this time. That is why so many of us strove so hard to find a peaceful solution. Saddam Hussein clearly does not care deeply about the suffering of his people and is quite prepared to embark on these adventures, as he showed in the Iran-Iraq war and now with his aggression against Kuwait. His aggression exposes his people, including children, to very real suffering. I hope that the Red Cross will be able to perform its wide role not just in respect of prisoners of war but perhaps in other ways.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As one who represents many of the service men and women in the Gulf and their families, may I join in the tributes paid to their courage and resilience. Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been some criticism that the royal yacht Britannia, which was originally built as a hospital ship, has not been sent to the Gulf? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that RFA Argus, which he and I grew to know well during our time in Northern Ireland when it was under construction and then in commission, is the most suitable medical support ship? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the choice made by the Government was entirely to give our forces the best possible support?

Mr. King: Yes, that is absolutely correct. RFA Argus was built by Harland and Wolff and has been converted to a hospital ship. It will play a useful and substantial role. It was the most convenient ship to use. I must make it clear that we were well aware that Her Majesty would wish any requirement for a hospital ship for the troops to take precedence over the royal yacht's use in any royal duties. However, it was on the other side of the Atlantic at the time and would have needed some conversion work such as helicopter decks and other things and it was quicker and more convenient to use RFA Argus.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the Secretary of State accept that, as Iraq has invaded a second neighbouring country, those who demonstrate for peace would do well to demonstrate outside Iraqi embassies? As a former joint chairman of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, has he received any information from those allies on help in pursuing the campaign? I understand that their Opposition leader would like to send a field hospital.

Mr. King: I have not received any such request or suggestion, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is in Dublin this afternoon. I am sure that he would be willing to receive any offers of support. The multinational support that we are getting is widely spread through many countries. As the evil of the Iraqi regime is now being exposed, many people wish to see how they can contribute. I pay tribute to the Republic of Ireland, which has contributed to other United Nations forces in the past.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): I congratulate my right hon. Friend, Mr. Dick Cheney, General Colin Powell, President Bush and our Prime Minister on their conception and implementation of this campaign so far. It has been specifically designed to minimise allied and Iraqi civilian casualties. Does not that contrast most starkly with Saddam Hussein's flagrant disregard for human life —particularly civilian human life—in using Scud missiles against the civilian populations of Israel and Saudi Arabia, and his flagrant violation of the Geneva convention in respect of our own and allied prisoners of war?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can confirm, from the evidence available to me, that it seems that our requirements to minimise civilian casualties and to ensure that the campaign is conducted so as to minimise our casualties are being met in the way that we would wish. None the less, we could experience setbacks, as I warned the House. We would much rather never have had this conflict in the first place. If there had been no aggression, no conflict would have been necessary.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Secretary of State recognise that many of us think that his announcement about telephone calls is unbelievably mean? Even if every man and woman in the services could use this facility, it would cost a maximum of £400,000 a month, whereas in the same period the war would have cost the country £130 million. As we hope to reclaim a substantial part of these costs from other countries, I urge the Minister to think again and to see whether he can achieve a better scheme to help men and women who have shown a readiness to put their lives on the line.

Mr. King: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman listened to what I said. We built on the experience of the United States authorities, which tried a free trial and found that it led only to greater congestion and fewer people—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman may seek to advance this as a great cause, but I understand from all the reports that I have received that our forces regard it as a very fair arrangement. I believe—some of the soldiers in the Gulf would agree with this—that some of

[Mr. King]

our forces in Northern Ireland are undertaking tasks, and have done so for many years, that are every bit as challenging and dangerous as some of the assignments in the Gulf. The right hon. Gentleman has not spoken up for them before. I am anxious to ensure, as far as possible, that we treat people fairly, and I think that this is a very fair scheme.

Dame Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): Will my right hon. Friend consider the feasibility of setting up a blood donor unit in the Palace of Westminster so that those of us who want to support the troops in a practical way will be able to do so?

Mr. King: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. In many ways, practical suggestions mean a great deal to our forces in the Gulf. The Lord President has heard my hon. Friend's comments and he is happy to look into them.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Did the Secretary of State see the report in yesterday's *Evening Standard* that Iraqi troops were shot while they were praying? How does that square with the allies' claim that they would be sensitive to religious issues? Does he condone the killing of Iraqi troops while they were praying and what is he going to do about it?

Mr. King: I have no knowledge of that allegation. Obviously, I do not know whether it is possible to check whether it is true. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that in this regrettable conflict there will undoubtedly be a lot of propaganda and many attempts to deceive and exploit such emotions. The hon. Gentleman should check whether the allegations are soundly based before he makes them.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): My right hon. Friend has let it be known in the past few days that he is extremely worried that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis may attempt to use chemical weapons. Will he, through whatever channels remain open to him, ensure that the Iraqis are aware that, according to the conventions and articles of war, if they do such a thing, they will be dealt the most grievous retaliation?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. It cannot be emphasised too strongly and I am grateful for the forceful way in which he put it.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Does the Secretary of State agree that the best way to avoid the grim prospect of a land war in the Gulf would be for the undoubtedly brave and patriotic service men of the Iraqi armed forces to rid their country of a Government who have brought shame and destruction on their Arab nation? Will he assure the House that we and all members of the coalition respect the integrity of Iraq and that we want to help the Iraqis to reconstruct and to achieve a democratic future for their people?

Mr. King: We certainly have no quarrel with the people of Iraq and we have no ambition for their territory. We have the deepest sympathy for them as they suffer under the present regime.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend recall that before D day the allies had overwhelming command of the air, yet it still took a year before the land campaign was won? In that context, will he confirm that there will be no question of a ceasefire to enable Saddam Hussein to launch an Ardennes-type offensive?

Does he consider the 100 Iraqi aeroplanes that have gone to Iran to be effectively neutralised, or do they still constitute a threat?

Mr. King: On the last point, Iran is, of course, a member of the United Nations and therefore bound by the resolutions. It must—and has made it clear that it will—give full support to the United Nations resolutions, so I sincerely trust that the aeroplanes will play no further part in the conflict.

On the first point about carrying through the campaign, it would be wrong to our forces who are now embarked if there were to be a stop-start situation—a hesitation then a start again—which would allow the enemy to regroup. We have given Saddam Hussein every opportunity. We went not only a further mile, but a further mile again. He failed to take that opportunity. We must ensure the liberation of Kuwait and the achievement of the United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Secretary of State now address the substantial complaint in the Scottish press about its access to Scottish front-line troops in the Gulf? The Scottish regiments comprise up to 40 per cent. of the front-line forces. What is his Department doing to dispel the suspicion that, when looking for people to get shot at in the desert, the Ministry of Defence looks to Scotland first, but that when looking for people to comment or write on it, it looks to Scotland last?

Mr. King: I apologise, because the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) raised the matter with me and has already written to me. I can confirm that we looked into the matter. We have teams in the Gulf, but they cannot rely absolutely on unlimited access to the front-line area. A vacancy has now come up and a Scottish reporter will join one of the front-line teams.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon West): In Germany yesterday, the wives expressed their particular concern about matters to do with bereavement. Will my right hon. Friend assure those wives and the House that Christian counselling will be provided for men and women who are wounded and that, in cases of bereavement, there will be Christian burial and, wherever possible, burial back in the United Kingdom if the next-of-kin so wish it?

Mr. King: On the first point about Christian counselling, I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. She made a further point regarding burial. The usual practice is for forces to be buried close to the battlefield where they fall. The arrangement that we are making in this case—following our experience of the Falklands campaign—is that, although there will be temporary local burial, families will subsequently have the choice of a Christian burial for their relatives in the Gulf area or the repatriation of the body for burial in this country.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I make a plea to the Secretary of State on behalf of an admittedly small number of service men's families? I

refer to those members of the American forces in the Persian Gulf who are Scots-born, whose parents in Scotland are given no facilities to write to them. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask his officials to discuss the matter with their American counterparts? A laddie in my constituency has a son fighting with the American marines and receives no concessions whatever. Admittedly, I am talking about a small number of service men, but their interests need to be taken care of none the less.

Mr. King: I had not heard that, but I shall certainly look into the matter because I am sure that the Americans would wish people in that position to have any facilities that it was possible to give them.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the allies have control of the skies, with all that that means in military terms, is substantially due to what happened in the first days of the action and to the tremendous job of destroying airfield capability by the Royal Air Force Tornado crews? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the RAF presentation team will come to the House on 19 February and that hon. Members will have the opportunity to put to it any questions that they wish?

As for Scotland, Scots have always been proud to serve this country, whether in Scottish regiments, in the Royal Air Force or in the Royal Navy.

Mr. King: I certainly recognise the truth of my hon. Friend's latter sentence. I am pleased that the RAF presentation team is to come to the House. That will give hon. Members a chance to learn more about the training and background activities of the Royal Air Force which have contributed to its outstanding contribution to the multinational effort.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Secretary of State aware that some of the young Scottish soldiers are writing home to their mums and families asking for supplies such as talcum powder, boiled sweets, boots, gloves and toothpaste? *[Laughter.]* This is no light matter. Did the Secretary of State see on television the other night the appalling sight of young American soldiers shivering? I only hope that none of the British troops is sitting over there shivering while we bask in this heat and that they have the comforts that are due to them.

Mr. King: We have certainly sought to provide as well as we can for our forces, and hon. Members who have been out to the Gulf have concluded that our efforts have generally been successful. We have also sought to do something about the parcel service, in so far as it is possible to get parcels through, which it will be in the next days. I have not yet told the House of the very constructive offer made by United Carriers, which has depots round the country. If any of the mums to whom the hon. Gentleman referred takes her parcel to a United Carriers depot, the company will deliver it free of charge to the defence postal and courier headquarters in London, from where it will go free of charge to the Gulf.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Will my right hon. Friend confirm and reaffirm that allied war aims have not altered at all since 15 January and are contained entirely in the United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 678, and that every single action that has been taken by allied troops has been in pursuit of—and only in pursuit of—those United Nations resolutions and that that will remain the case until the end of the fighting?

Mr. King: I can certainly give that assurance. I believe that some people may not have studied those resolutions in the past. Those are absolutely the war aims on which we are agreed and which I think commentators, in analysing them, realise must be the objectives that we should pursue.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Is the Secretary of State aware that constituents of mine whose husbands are working as civilians on the Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia are very concerned because their husbands, although they have been supplied with gas masks, have been given no extra clothing, training, instruction or assistance of any kind, as I understand it? Will he institute a thorough investigation so that British civilians working in the Gulf area may be fully protected from possible chemical warfare attacks?

Mr. King: I am not clear whether the hon. Gentleman is referring to civilians working for the Ministry of Defence or the Government or civilians working for contractors in the Gulf. It is initially the responsibility of their employers to ensure that they are properly provided for, and if employers approached us we would always see what assistance we could give. In the case of gas masks, we have sought to do that.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is now a large number of local support groups for the families of the troops, and not just in the traditional garrison towns? I cite, for example, Gulf Troops and Family Support set up in my constituency by Mr. and Mrs. Brister, who have a son in the Gulf. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that such groups receive full encouragement and assistance and that there is no effort to squeeze them out because they are not traditional, long-established groups? Will he, in particular, talk to British Telecom and get it to be more helpful?

Mr. King: We would give them any help and encouragement that we could. I am very grateful to them for the role that they are playing. I am grateful, also, to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members because I believe that one of the most valuable forms of help and support for those groups is the interest of their local Members of Parliament.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is it not a sad, serious and chilling reminder of dangers ahead that the House has been told that only half Saddam Hussein's capacity to produce chemical and biological weapons has been destroyed? Recognising that he not only threatens to use these weapons but has used them in the past against Kurds and others and that this is a danger to our troops, to civilians in Saudi Arabia and to civilians in Israel, whether Arab or Jewish, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to assure the House that every effort is being made to destroy not only the remaining 50 per cent. of production capacity but existing stocks, which he has not mentioned?

Mr. King: I can confirm that some storage has been destroyed, although we also believe that there has been some dispersal, mainly in the form of artillery ammunition, of some of the chemical stocks, for example. These matters underline what I said about the monstrous

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scale of that military machine. I believe that the House has been impressed by the scale of the air campaign and by the volume of munitions used. It is a measure of the scale of that machine that I have to report to the House that there is still some way to go before the land campaign can be safely embarked upon.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. Friend accept that throughout the country there is the profoundest admiration for and gratitude to all who have taken part in this campaign so far, from the Prime Minister and himself down? Does he also accept that an essential prerequisite for the superb performance of our RAF Tornado pilots in this campaign was the low-flying training that they received in peace time? Does he therefore share my hope that when the conflict is over we shall hear a little less from the whingers and whiners who have tried to reduce those training programmes?

Mr. King: Nothing could have shown more clearly the importance of that low-flying training. I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because I know that in his constituency he will have had representations in the past and I appreciate his robust and important position on this.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Should not the right hon. Gentleman express his appreciation of the resolute support given to him in the latest resolution of the national executive committee of the Labour party? Does he understand that a large portion of the parliamentary Labour party does not support the leadership on this issue?

Mr. King: I would love to respond to that question, but I do not think that it is for me.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): What my right hon. Friend said about the importance that the Government attach to proper postal and telephone arrangements will come as a great reassurance to the parents of a 21-year-old lance-corporal serving in the 39th Field Regiment who contacted me today to tell me of the problems that they have had. Is my right hon. Friend aware of any special problems in people receiving mail from Germany—for example, soldiers receiving letters from their wives? If there is a backlog, will he undertake to have it examined?

Mr. King: A number of difficult complications have arisen because of the basis on which some units have come to serve in the Gulf, but we are trying to deal with them. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says. We are anxious. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is very keen to hear any other points, and we shall certainly try to sort them out.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Most hon. Members appreciate the regular and lengthy reporting by the Secretary of State to the House. I do not expect the Secretary of State to respond to every rumour, but is he in a position to confirm or deny that some of the aircraft that left Iraq for Iran have been shuttling back and forth from that country? What does that say about the Iraqi aims? Is the right hon. Gentleman able to confirm the story, again emanating from the United States, that Iraqi missiles are being smuggled into Jordan, stuffed inside oil trucks?

Mr. King: I have no information on the latter point. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, there may have been some redisposition of some Iraqi planes within Iran, but I do not know whether the Iranian authorities chose to position them on alternative airfields for their own convenience. I am not sure whether the question implied that they were going back into Iraq. I have no evidence of their doing that.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): May I ask my right hon. Friend about television coverage? Although nobody in this House would wish to restrict political comment, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is room for some self-restraint, particularly by recently retired senior service officers who appear on television and discuss detailed tactics, just at the moment when the ground forces are about to be engaged with the enemy? Does my right hon. Friend agree that some self-restraint might be a good idea?

Mr. King: I do agree. It is a challenge in a free society such as ours, when freedom of speech and comment is so readily available, when we are confronting a very dangerous enemy and when it may be possible for that enemy to glean important insights into our approaches and military practices from comments that are made. I hope and believe that those senior retired military officers are aware of that risk.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does not the battle over Khafji confirm what many of us feared and predicted from the outset—that once the ground fighting starts in earnest there will be many casualties on both sides? How many more people must die in this senseless conflict before a ceasefire is eventually called and more diplomatic effort is put into trying to build on attempts to find a peaceful solution, such as that which was tried yesterday by Secretary of State Baker and his Soviet counterpart?

Mr. King: A ceasefire now would be very welcome to Saddam Hussein. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, who took an initial view on this, does not seem to have noticed during the pursuit of this campaign just how evil and dangerous is his monstrous military might. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) pointed out just how obscene are some of the practices that he follows. It would certainly be to the advantage of Saddam Hussein if we had a ceasefire, but I do not think that it would ensure future good order or benefit the world if we had one at this time.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his decisions, first, to reduce telephone rates for troops—he will recall that I raised that very point before the war started—and, secondly, to introduce the domestic parcel rate, which will no doubt boost morale? Will he give an assurance that he is constantly looking at ways of boosting morale? Will he consider specifically the possibility of photographs being taken of troops in situ which will not compromise any secret positions, which could be sent home to families? That would be a significant morale booster.

Mr. King: Much of that is happening already, but I shall certainly look into the point. We are anxious to pursue any ideas which hon. Members may have. We have

been able to do a certain amount. Other ideas will be obstructed for operational reasons and difficulties, but we shall do anything that we can.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Has the Secretary of State had time to consider the special problems faced by schools attended by the children of armed service personnel? Last week representatives from the National Union of Teachers visited some of those schools to discuss with teachers the problems that they are experiencing. Will the Secretary of State give additional support to those schools so that they can work effectively with the children, who are suffering enormous fear and trauma as a result of what is happening to their families? Most of the schools are based in Germany, so they do not have the normal environment and support and that is an additional problem. Will the Secretary of State try to do something about that?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Her point is a serious one. Tremendous efforts are being made. She will know that staff in the schools are receiving counselling and we are trying to deal with the problem. The problem for children during this television war is worrying. Every night they go home and see more pictures of what may be happening and of bombs, bullets and shells. We take the point seriously.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard to the business before the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It is our pensions.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cryer: I was elected to speak here, not to keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but other hon. Members were also elected to speak.

I shall allow questions on the statement to run for a further 15 minutes. I hope that we shall then have a short period of business questions because we should reach the main business by 5 o'clock.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Returning to the subject of support from our European colleagues for the war effort, will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that, while Conservative MEPs wholeheartedly support the Government's position and are doing all that they can to persuade their European colleagues to do likewise, the Labour MEPs en bloc do not even support the official Labour party policy and are actively discouraging their European colleagues from supporting the war effort?

Mr. King: I am sorry to hear that. I did not respond to the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). At a time when our forces are in the Gulf engaged in a dangerous conflict, I respect the position adopted by the Opposition on the matter. I am sorry that Labour Members of the European Parliament are not able to adopt the same position. Perhaps they are a little far away from the United Kingdom. They are very much out of step with the overwhelming opinion of the British people.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Will the Secretary of State confirm that diplomatic efforts will be redoubled, possibly through Tehran but also through whichever channels offer themselves, before we initiate a major commitment of our land forces to a land war from which shattered bodies would start to come home in horrendous and unacceptable numbers?

Mr. King: Our whole aim was, first, to avoid any conflict. Now that, regrettably, we find ourselves in this position, unless we are prepared to accept the aggression against Kuwait and what would clearly be the continuing expansion of Iraq and its particularly evil regime, we must face up to the reality of conflict, as the hon. Gentleman understands. That being the case, we are anxious to find ways of minimising casualties. We hope that it will be possible to do that. That is why the air campaign has been structured as it has. It is the first stage of what we hope will be the speedy liberation of Kuwait with the minimum casualties, not just among our forces—which is important —but among the people in Kuwait.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), on the firm way in which he condemned to the former Iraqi ambassador the treatment apparently meted out to allied prisoners of war? Will he confirm from the Dispatch Box that those who place prisoners of war in a place of danger, as well as those who ordered them to be placed there, will be brought before an international war crimes tribunal regardless of the outcome of the conflict?

Mr. King: We are taking a careful look at the conduct of any people involved in the conflict who may be in breach of conventions or international law. In the early days, when we had the outrageous treatment of hostages before the conflict started, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reminded people that under international law every individual is responsible for his actions.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the war aims of Britain and the United States do not include either the invasion and destruction of Iraq as a country or the use of nuclear weapons in the prosecution of the conflict?

Mr. King: I have already made it clear that our aims are the aims which are set out in the United Nations resolutions. They have not changed. They remain our objectives. We have no quarrel with the people of Iraq. We seek no acquisition of their territory. We make those points clear. We have to seek the earliest possible implementation of the United Nations resolutions. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Will my right hon. Friend convey the thanks of the House to the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association and to district headquarters, including the western district office which is based in my constituency, for the assistance that they are giving to Gulf support groups? Many wives of service men are giving up a great deal of their time, at considerable expense in telephone calls, to pull the families together so that they may share their concerns and news of their loved ones. It is an important morale booster to the troops to know that this is going on at home and that so many people in his Department are assisting them.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning SSAFA, not just because of what it is doing now. It will be an abiding encouragement to our forces to

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know not just that SSAFA is there during the present crisis but that its work will go on day in, day out in the years ahead. Certainly its work is beyond praise.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that during the past month I have been told constantly that I speak only for myself? I accept that. Is he also aware that I suspect that I speak for all my Scottish colleagues when I dissociate us from the remarks of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)? I doubt seriously that the Iraqis will ask whether men are Scottish, English, Irish or Welsh before they shoot them.

Is the Secretary of State really using the comparison of our troops in Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, with our troops in the Gulf for his pathetic approach to free telephone calls? Is he aware that when the open golf championship is played at St. Andrews, British Telecom can put in, overnight, 200 extra lines? When we walk along the Embankment, we can hardly get through because of all the British Telecom lines into the Secretary of State's own Department. Yet he is telling British troops that they cannot make free telephone calls home. Is not the position the same as with the poll tax—"It is only delayed; you will pay it when you get back. Lay down your lives and the Tories will have your money"?

Mr. King: I am disappointed in the hon. Member, who is an old pal. That is a disgraceful way to behave. We have addressed the matter seriously. It is easy to shout for free everything. The Americans tried it. The system broke down and the congestion was appalling. The Americans found that it was fairer for people to make a contribution, which helped to ensure that the maximum number of people could make calls. This is not Glasgow. It is not a matter of linking up to the golf course in St. Andrews. This is out in the desert, in forward positions. There is huge congestion. *[Interruption.]* I do not regard this as a laughing matter.

We are trying to do the best we can for our forces. Hon. Members should understand that the telephone system, with its limited range, has to cover 500,000 American troops, all wishing to ring home, more than 40,000 British troops and more than 10,000 French troops. The extra congestion poses major problems. There may be cheap publicity in appearing to stand up for our boys, but we are genuinely trying to do the best we can. The messages coming back are that the boys think that the present arrangement is fair.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Although it came rather later than might have been desirable, will my right hon. Friend warmly welcome the German Chancellor's clear statement that Germany would regard an attack on Turkey as an attack on NATO and, therefore, a genuine matter for German contribution? If that is allied with the German Defence Minister's statement that NATO is required because of the uncertainty in the Soviet Union, it is clear that the united Germany understands the role of NATO and is willing to play its part in NATO activities against possible out-of-area conflicts such as that in the Gulf.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The House will have appreciated the positive statements made by Chancellor Kohl. I have also talked to my counterpart, the reconfirmed Defence Minister, Gerhard Stoltenberg, and I am grateful for the support that the Germans are giving us, not merely the funds to which I referred today, but the significant assistance in kind as well.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the main lessons of the past two days of land fighting is that whatever else the war may be it will not be short, sharp and quick? Does the right hon. Gentleman now understand that not only must allied commanders resist being panicked into an early land war, but allied politicians must do everything in their power to avoid the necessity for a land war at all? Therefore, will he tell the House what he and other Ministers have done to open up diplomatic channels with Baghdad to secure the negotiated withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait so that they do not have to resort further to the carnage and killing to which he did not refer but which we all know has been taking place in the Gulf area for the past two weeks?

Mr. King: I do not think that I can add to what I have already said. I have made it clear that we sought every way at the United Nations—*[Interruption.]* I assume that the hon. Gentleman supports the United Nations. He knows perfectly well that the United Nations made every effort that it could to avoid conflict in the Gulf. It failed and it took the action to which it believed there was no alternative. We all regret it, but I still hope that, provided we stick to the campaign, we will achieve a reasonably early solution without the sort of casualties to which he refers. That is certainly our determination. The conflict can be ended now if Saddam Hussein immediately removes from Kuwait, ends the aggression and gives the clear assurance that he has no future aggressive intentions.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the vast majority of the British people believe that there will be peace in the middle east only when Saddam Hussein has been overthrown and, to that end, it will be necessary to do more than just evict the Iraqis from Kuwait?

Mr. King: I have made it clear that there is no point —well, not no point, but that it will be of limited benefit to liberate Kuwait, with the pain and difficulty involved, if it does not stay liberated. These are serious issues and the House, the country, the United Nations and the world are starting seriously to debate what would be the best approach to the eventualities that we may face at that time.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Partly since the effects of Chernobyl did not respect human frontiers, will the Secretary of State give us the facts on the damage to nuclear installations? Is there a radiation, Chernobyl-like problem? Does that go into, for instance, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia or Iran? What do we know about the effects of the dispersal of biological weapons? Those who bomb biological agent factories had better be clear about what the dispersal effects may be.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that before any of those attacks could be contemplated, it was necessary to conduct the most thorough research into the methods of attack to minimise the risk of contamination outside the sites or even outside the buildings. The information available to me is that that has been achieved. General Schwarzkopf was asked this question and he gave a similar answer. Detailed research was conducted into the weather conditions that should apply, the time of day and

the temperature at which attacks should be conducted and the method of attack that should be used against the building concerned.

This highlights the contrast between the way in which our air campaign has been conducted and the Iraqis' indiscriminate attacks with missiles. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will approve of that contrast. I know that he disapproves of Iraq's having nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and stores and that, therefore, he understands the importance of ensuring that those weapons be eliminated and that the elimination be carried out in the most painstaking way to minimise the risk of contamination.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): My right hon. Friend has quite rightly stressed the importance, in moral terms, of the postal services to our forces in the Gulf. The matter has been raised in the House on many occasions. May I say how pleased people are at what the Post Office has now decided to do and how delighted I personally am that he paid tribute to United Carriers. But why is the Post Office always the tail-end Charlie? Why cannot the Post Office be up front? Why cannot it be the first organisation to provide a parcel post service to our forces at a very low rate?

Mr. King: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said. I shall ensure that his remarks are conveyed to the chairman of the Post Office, who, from my personal knowledge of him, will deeply resent the "tail-end Charlie" accusation but will, instead, be first-past-the-post Nick.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that those hon. Members who have not been called to put questions on this statement will have some priority next time.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please, no points of order.

Business of the House

4.41 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Second Reading of the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill.

TUESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Until about seven o'clock, consideration of Lords amendments to the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

Second Reading of the Namibia Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th allotted day). Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "The Crisis in Training".

Afterwards, there will be a debate entitled "The Neglect of British Science and Science Education".

Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill.

FRIDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the British Technology Group Bill.

At seven o'clock the Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 6 February to consider the unnumbered explanatory memorandum dated 18 January, submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, on proposals relating to rules for the application of levy in the milk and milk products sector.

[European Standing Committee A
Wednesday 6 February

Relevant European Community Document
Unnumbered Milk Quotas: definition

Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee
HC 29-vii (1990-91)]

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I first thank the Leader of the House for arranging the important statement that has been made today by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and ask him for an assurance that the House will have the benefit of regular statements bringing us up to date about circumstances in the Gulf—not just for the benefit of hon. Members, although that is very important, but also for the benefit of the public at large?

When can we expect a debate on the Scottish Rate Support Grant Order? We have debated the proposals for England and Wales already. It is very important to Scotland that we should have an early opportunity to debate the impact of poll tax there. I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to assure us that such an opportunity will be provided soon.

In June last year, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor as Leader of the House published proposals on the means of dealing with private Bills in the House, and called for comments. Has the Leader of the House had

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a chance to assess the responses that he has received? Can he give any indication as to when we shall have an opportunity to consider any proposals that he may make for new ways of dealing with private business? I understand that this will require primary legislation. Can the Leader of the House give any indication when the House may expect such proposals?

We now know that Budget day will be 19 March, but we have not yet had an opportunity to debate the Chancellor's autumn statement of last year. It would be rather odd—indeed, unsatisfactory—if we were to debate the Chancellor's autumn statement just a day or two before the presentation of his Budget. I understand the Government's reluctance to arrange such a debate, particularly as the country slides deeper and deeper into a damaging and debilitating recession, but I must press the Leader of the House to arrange a debate on the autumn statement as quickly as possible. It is a matter of great importance to us all.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about statements on the Gulf situation. As I have told him, we are all anxious to ensure that the House is kept fully informed—I take his point about the wider audience—whenever appropriate. I hope that the fact that this week we have had two statements and lengthy periods of questions on them shows that we certainly intend to fulfil that commitment.

With regard to the Scottish RSG order, I have to be careful about making any predictions. In this job I have learnt quite rapidly that things can arise that upset what one originally intended to do. I hope that it will be possible to deal with this matter in the week beginning 11 February.

I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the question of private Bills procedure. This is an important subject, in which a number of hon. Members take an interest. I welcome the opportunity to make the position clear. As the hon. Gentleman has indicated, the Government published last summer a consultation document entitled "Private Bills and New Procedures". This resulted in over 100 responses broadly in favour of a new system. The primary legislation required to implement the proposed changes will be complex, and it will not be ready for introduction in the present Session. However, subject to the usual reservations about anticipating the contents of future Queen's Speeches, I can say that such a Bill should be ready for introduction at the earliest opportunity.

I have also been discussing with the Chairman of Ways and Means a number of possible changes to Standing Orders for the handling of private business. It is our agreed aim that these should be put before the House by Easter and that, if approved, they should come into operation at the start of next Session. This will, I hope, give all involved and interested in private Bills adequate notice before new Bills are prepared and deposited. In conjunction with the Chairman of Ways and Means, I shall ensure that the House has time to study the proposals before they are moved.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about the autumn statement, I can tell him that there is certainly no reluctance to debate these matters. Indeed, in recent weeks we have had a number of debates on the economy. However, now that the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service has reported, I recognise the importance of getting on with that debate, and I hope that I shall be able to cover it in my next business statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that there is important business before us today and considerable pressure from Members who want to speak. I shall allow questions to continue until 5.5 pm, and then we really will have to move on. I hope that those hon. Members who were called to put questions on the statement about the Gulf will not seek to participate again at this stage. That would help.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has had an opportunity to take a preliminary look at the experience of the two European Standing Committees this week. If not, may I draw his attention to two potential problems? The first concerns the availability of documents, in view of the fact that these Committees will do tremendously important work. The second concerns the composition of the Committees. Given the nature of their work, I wonder whether he might consider increasing the size of the Committees. I think that this will be an important matter.

Mr. MacGregor: I said when we debated these Committees recently that it was important that we be ready to review them. I referred not only to a major review of how things have been going but also to a preparedness to review things that occur in the Committees from time to time. I shall certainly look into my hon. Friend's point about documents. The composition of the Committees is a matter on which we shall have to keep a careful watch.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Despite the fact that my Northern Ireland colleagues and I have supported fully the Government's policy in relation to the Gulf, we deplore the fact that we have not had sufficient opportunity to ensure that proper tribute is paid to Northern Ireland service men—Catholic and Protestant—who are serving loyally with British forces there. I trust that such an opportunity will be afforded at the earliest possible date. We also want an early opportunity to learn whether the Leader of the House is satisfied with the Irish Government's contribution to the campaign.

Mr. MacGregor: I note the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and I am sure that he will have an opportunity to repeat his comments in future debates on the Floor of the House. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence would want to join me in paying tribute for all that is being done by the forces from Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that the operation of the new European Standing Committees should be reconsidered. Given that we are trying to improve scrutiny procedures, will my right hon. Friend re-examine the question of right hon. and hon. Members being able to make telephone calls on dedicated lines, and of being able to send mail to the European institutions at the usual postage rate, using official envelopes? I remind my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question would be fair. There is great pressure on time today.

Mr. Dykes: Other long questions have been asked, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I know, but the hon. Member must have consideration for his colleagues.

Mr. MacGregor: The European Standing Committees are a new experiment. They are important not only in maintaining close scrutiny over European legislation but in relation to working late hours in the Chamber. I accept that, because they are new, it will be important to monitor them carefully to ensure that we continue to get them right. As to my hon. Friend's second point, the question of communications facilities will go before the Services Committee shortly.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House provide an early opportunity for a debate on small firms, particularly in view of the record number of liquidations and bankruptcies, and of the penal and punitive interest rates, which are forcing them out of existence? I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to a letter from the president of Bradford chamber of commerce to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which he refers to the

"increasing and damaging pressure being put on small manufacturing firms".

It is clear that the concern expressed by my right hon. and hon. Friends is more widespread, and that there should be a debate on that topic.

Mr. MacGregor: I would love to go into the whole argument about small firms, but I will not do so now in view of time constraints. Right hon. and hon. Members had an opportunity to discuss that issue in economic debates in the past, but I do not doubt that it could be raised again in future debates.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the second debate next Wednesday will provide an opportunity to discuss the possible threat to nuclear physics in the United Kingdom, as a result of our ever-increasing contribution to CERN, the European centre for nuclear research?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, any matters relating to science can be raised in that debate.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House urgently arrange a debate on the prosecution of the Gulf war? A business motion on today's Order Paper will allow right hon. and hon. Members to remain in the House all night to debate the burning topic of ministerial salaries and pensions, yet the time allowed for questions on the statement today by the Secretary of State for Defence was insufficient to allow all right hon. and hon. Members who wanted to contribute to do so.

A further debate on the Gulf would provide the Secretary of State for Defence with an opportunity to re-read yesterday's *Evening Standard,* which publicised a report, obviously cleared by military censors, in which Colonel Reisch, who leads the American pilots, said that the bombing of Iraqi soldiers as they prayed by the roadside was "a fun mission". Is that what the war is about —having fun by blowing up people at prayer?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows full well the seriousness of the situation, and the objectives of allied action have been spelt out on many occasions. There have been two recent debates, but I am prepared to consider another when the need arises. The two long statements made this week should indicate that we are making every effort to ensure that the House is kept fully informed.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Last night, the Government forced through the House, with a miserable majority, the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. That legislation, for which only 90 minutes of debate was allowed, will radically alter Northern Ireland's health service, to its detriment, and to that of the people who use it. Will the right hon. Gentleman make time next week for a debate, in which I could urge the Government to give people the right to vote in a local referendum before a hospital is permitted to opt out of the health service? I am thinking particularly of the Ulster hospital in Dundonald, in my constituency.

Mr. MacGregor: Right hon. and hon. Members had more than one and a half hours to consider such matters last night. There are considerable pressures on the business of the House, so debates must be contained. I must tell my hon. Friend that I see no possibility of a further debate next week.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House seriously and urgently reconsider giving Government time to another debate on the Gulf? Members of Parliament number more than 650, yet the overwhelming majority of them have been denied an opportunity to express their views about that serious war. Today's statement and questions lasted more than an hour, yet several hon. Members were denied an opportunity to speak—notably the dissenting voices among them. Given that 8 million or 9 million British people oppose the war, if the objectives change and it becomes clear that the destruction of Iraq—with all the casualties that would involve—is the Government's new policy, support for the war will disappear like snowflakes on a boiler. For God's sake give us a chance to express the views of the men and women who are against the war. The Leader of the House has a responsibility to do that, and I hope that he will grant that request.

Mr. MacGregor: I reject absolutely the hon. Gentleman's assertion about the direction in which public opinion will go. I think that public opinion is very clear. As to parliamentary opinion, there have been two votes recently, in which right hon. and hon. Members were able to declare their position. I can add nothing to my earlier remarks about opportunities for discussion and debate in the House in future weeks.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): May I ask my right hon. Friend for a debate soon on early-day motion 372?

[That this House notes with concern that the good work done by the Taunton Association for the Homeless, which has been providing hostel accommodation for 15 years, is in danger because of the Government's decision to withdraw the hostel's deficit grant; and calls on the Government to ensure funds are available to secure the position of this voluntary organisation.]

That motion, which is in the name of several Opposition Members, concerns Taunton Association for the Homeless in my constituency. While I welcome the interest that those hon. Members have shown in that excellent voluntary organisation, such a debate would enable me to point out that I raised the problem with Ministers before the new year. I received an excellent and

[Mr. David Nicholson]

helpful reply from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), which gives the opportunity of funds for that organisation. I may point out that, in that respect, as in others, the Labour party is out of date.

Mr. MacGregor: I have read early-day motion 372, and my hon. Friend has already made some good points in relation to it. He will know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced very early this year new and improved arrangements for the capital and revenue funding for special needs provision by housing associations. Over the next two years, we will more than double the available resources for revenue support, which will safeguard schemes already in receipt of grant and provide support for a continuing programme of new schemes.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange a statement next week on the money allocated by Germany to Britain in the mercenary Gulf war? Germany lost the last war, but now the British Government are going cap in hand to the losers—who are now the winners, supposedly—to beg money, grovelling at the feet of the Germans in trying to provide the necessary finances. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, within 24 hours of the ink being dry on that £275 million allocation, the Germans increased their interest rates, with the consequence that they made more money on the exchanges than the value of their contribution? The net result is that, 24 hours later, we are even worse off. Will the Leader of the House also say what the Marquess of Queensberry rules are in respect of B52 carpet bombing?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman asks the most tortuous questions. Earlier this afternoon, he received very clear answers from my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of the German contribution.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I ask my right hon. Friend to anticipate the return to the Floor of the House of the Road Traffic (Random Breath Testing) Bill, which is aimed at reducing casualties and offending. Given the short ten-minute debate and Division, and the short debate in Committee without a Division on whether or not it would be better to encourage a change of behaviour or to take more police action, may the House have the opportunity for a full debate on Report? That would allow right hon. and hon. Members to decide whether it would be better to reduce bad behaviour, which is my view, or that more police action is the way to stop people offending —which is the view of the shadow Transport Minister.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that this is an important Bill. At this stage, I cannot say exactly what arrangements will be made when it returns to the Floor of the House, but I hope that there will be a full opportunity to debate the important matters that he has mentioned.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware from his own experience that British agriculture is facing its worst financial crisis for 50 years. To try to restore confidence in that ailing industry, will he find time to debate Government policies?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that one of the key issues here is the proposal that the Commission is discussing at present relating to further Community reforms. I understand that the Commission is meeting today to finalise its proposals, with a view to presenting them to the Council of Agriculture meeting next week. I think that he will be well aware from the responses made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in questions last week of our attitude to a number of those proposals, and of our determination to try to fight to protect British interests and to remove the discriminatory elements in the proposals, if there are any. I am sure that there will be an opportunity to explore these matters in some form or another when the position becomes somewhat clearer, and I shall bear in mind what he has said.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My right hon. Friend has said that European Standing Committee A will consider agriculture matters. Will he also find an early opportunity to allow the House to debate agriculture and farm incomes? He knows better than most of the Government's efforts on behalf of farmers but, bearing in mind the uncertainty over GATT and over EC reform proposals, would it not be helpful to have a debate in the House on that subject?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right to add the GATT round, because it is another major aspect of this issue. We are somewhat unclear exactly what the proposals will be, so it is important to wait and see how matters develop, but I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 364, "Privatisation for Crown Suppliers Transport", and the allegation that I have made about a prospective buyer, Mr. Bill Pinkney?

[That this House notes a series of parliamentary replies from the Parliamentary Secretary, Department of the environment, dated 24th January relating to the sale of Crown Suppliers transport section and investigations into the activities of civil servant Mr. Bill Pinkney the prospective buyer; notes the evasive nature of the Ministerial reply, Official Report, column 27, which refers to 'the Crown Suppliers following up the matters arising from that audit'; notes that under the general heading of 'Disciplinary matters', the Crown Suppliers after a full investigation in 1990 did find that the level of Mr. Pinkney's behaviour fell below the level which was expected of an official; notes that the investigation found overpayments, dubious entries, unauthorised payments and a failure to declare a conflict of interest with a company called Turnbulls; notes that the Chief Executive of Crown Suppliers did consider formal charges but decided not to proceed with them as Ministers did not wish to prejudice the sale of the transport section to Mr. Bill Pinkney and his associates; notes that attempts by senior civil servants under instruction from Ministers to hide away the nature of irregularities and disciplinary offences were orchestrated so as to avoid embarrassment to the Government; questions the role of Shandwick, the public relations company, in preparing grossly misleading press

releases relating to the sell off to a so-called management buy-out which is not a buy-out at all but an offer funded by a North of England second hand car dealer; and unreservedly condemns Ministers for their shameful actions.]

Can we have an assurance that, if Mr. Pinkney is a successful purchaser of the transport section, an announcement will be made not in a written reply but orally at the Dispatch Box so that we can ask questions relating to the activities of that gentleman?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the hon. Gentleman has already been asking questions on that matter. As far as the early-day motion is concerned, I must make it clear that Ministers at the Department of the Environment are not generally consulted about disciplinary matters, and were not consulted about Mr. Pinkney's case. However, appropriate action was taken by the Crown Suppliers' management. Nor have Ministers issued any instructions about the treatment of any irregularities involving Mr. Pinkney.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering a bid for Mr. Pinkney's team for the Crown Suppliers' vehicle hire and maintenance business, and his conclusions will be announced as soon as possible. Members of the team, sources of finance, control and structure of the proposed new company will be included among the factors to be taken into account in assessing their bid for the business. It would, therefore, be premature to discuss the matter in the House.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is about five years since the House had an opportunity to discuss civil aviation policy? Given the current problems facing civil aviation, which have been brought to a head, first by the Civil Aviation Authority's recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport on traffic distribution rules and secondly by the difficulties facing two major American carriers at Heathrow—which introduces the question of successor rights and negotiations with the United States over the Bermuda 2 agreement on bilaterals—it is important that the House has the opportunity to debate these matters. A ferocious debate is taking place outside this Chamber. Surely it is time that we had the opportunity to debate it within this Chamber.

Mr. MacGregor: The second point to which my hon. Friend refers is one of great concern, especially since the United States' delegation was unable to continue negotiations on 30 January because its instructions did not allow it sufficient flexibility to enable a conclusion to be reached on certain matters put to it. It has been made clear that the Government are willing to resume negotiations as soon as the United States wishes to do so. I am aware of the importance of this matter, and of the concern felt by hon. Members, and I shall certainly discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): When will the Leader of the House fulfil his long-standing promise to let us debate Lord Cullen's report on the Piper Alpha? Can we have two days for that debate, in view of the complexity of the subject and the wide-ranging interests involved? Secondly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No, at this stage in the evening, one question is sufficient.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that it has not been possible to agree a suitable time for a debate yet. I shall continue to bear the possibility in mind but, knowing the business in front of the House, and especially the need to enable the House to discuss Gulf matters, I do not think that a two-day debate will be possible.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Currie, but very briefly.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Further to the point about the important European Standing Committees, is my right hon. Friend aware that their first meetings this week were a bit of a shambles? Does he accept that we need bigger Committees, we need Whips, we need the papers in time, and, most important of all, we need to know the timetable so that we know when they will meet, and what they will be discussing in future?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of some of the problems that occurred this week and, as I have already said, we need to be willing to review them. As regards information about the timetable, I hope that the fact that I announce the Standing Committees in the business statement will help.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Reverting to that very subject, is the Lord President aware that last Tuesday's European Standing Committee B disposed of its business, but yesterday my information is that European Standing Committee A did not, and that it decided to sit again—I believe, next Wednesday? Can the Minister tell us about this? Can he confirm that it will sit again? Can he announce when it will do so, and can he confirm that it will not clash with his announcement about that same Committee meeting on Wednesday next?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that that can be sorted out and that the European Standing Committee will meet to complete the other business and also to discuss this other important and urgent matter.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): When does the Leader of the House expect to be able to comply with the Standing Orders of the House and set up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs?

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to what I have already said about that matter on a number of occasions.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Today the Government tabled a statutory instrument imposing an eight-day continuous ban on the fishing industry. Is the Leader of the House aware that the objections to this statutory instrument by Members with fishing interests involve the fact that it is dangerous, and that it might cost lives? In view of that, will he arrange for a debate in the near future—not in a month's time—so that hon. Members can face up to the question whether it is morally right to impose further dangers upon fishermen at sea?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that the issues involved in this matter have already been debated in the House. I cannot promise a debate next week, but I shall draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Points of Order

5.7 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that it has been announced that the cases against 30 Iraqi and Palestinian nationalists detained by the Home Secretary are to be heard during the next three days. These people have not been told of the case against them, except in general terms. They are not allowed legal representation and, even if the tribunal sat for ten hours a day—unusual in legal circles—there would be only about an hour for each case.

I wonder whether requests have been received for the Home Secretary to make a statement, because Britain has set itself high standards in the administration of justice, and natural justice demands that each case be given a thorough hearing. It is for the Home Secretary to maintain those standards, not to short-circuit them. I wonder whether, if a request is made for a statement, or if further explanation is forthcoming from the Government, you will facilitate such a statement.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to grant statements of that kind but for the Leader of the House, who is present and who, I am sure, has heard what has been said.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I called all four hon. Members previously, and they will have heard what I said about their other colleagues who wish to participate. However, I have to take points of order, so I shall take Mr. Ross first.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I hesitate to cause delay, but this is a serious matter. The lawyers of the people who will face tribunals, if they go ahead, this weekend will have to find support against the deportation orders from the period of 15, 16 or 17 years while those people were resident in this country, and they do not have enough time. The Home Secretary ought to come here to make a statement to reassure us that the high standards of justice that we expect in this country will be extended to those individuals.

Mr. Speaker: It would have been much more appropriate if matters of this sort had been raised with the Leader of the House during business questions, because he can answer those questions and I cannot answer them as points of order.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I hope that this is on something different.

Mr. Hughes: While I make no complaint, Mr. Speaker, that you quite properly called those hon. Members who rose during the Gulf debate and during business questions or that they raised issues then that they would have raised during the Gulf statement, could you consider those hon. Members who did not seek to rise during the Gulf statement but tried to raise matters during business questions and were not allowed to do so? Indeed, as you said, some of the issues being raised now could have been mentioned during business questions had there been time.

Mr. Speaker: That is a helpful suggestion, but I always keep a list of the names of the hon. Members who are called last in business questions so that they will at least be given some priority next time, even if they are not called first. Good luck.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is on that very matter.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, really?

Mr. Cryer: At the conclusion of the Gulf statement, Mr. Speaker, you said that you could not call half a dozen of us, but that there might be other opportunities. The opportunities are limited, however, because—understandably—so many hon. Members wish to speak. You often say in such circumstances that you will bear in mind those who have not been called when another statement is made on the same topic. I hope that you will be able to do that in the event of a future Gulf statement.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that. Lastly, I call Mr. Spearing.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On an unavoidable point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard the Leader of the House announce that, next Wednesday, European Standing Committee A would consider two matters: first, the matter that it started to consider yesterday, and, secondly, the question of milk quotas definition, which was referred to in the business statement and in questions.

Will the Leader of the House assure us that the second debate can indeed last for two and a half hours, as provided in Standing Orders? If he cannot give us that assurance, will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that he will lay the necessary business motion to enable it to do so?

Mr. Speaker: What goes on in Standing Committees is not a matter for me, but I am sure that the Leader of the House has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Orders of the Day

Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.11 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I should like to make two points at the outset. First, the vast majority of the proposals that we are considering today, both in the Bill and in the subsequent motion endorsing the draft regulations, follow Top Salaries Review Body recommendations; secondly, they were made some time ago, so, to put it mildly, we have not shown indecent haste in implementing them. There is no question of our doing hon. Members any favours. The proposals are modest and overdue. As some of the main benefits —taking both together—go to widows of Members, who have often had to make many sacrifices as a result of their parliamentary life and whose rewards would not, I think, be described as great, I hope that we can agree to them tonight.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am sorry to intervene so early in the right hon. Gentleman's speech. It is noteworthy, however, that the Leader of the House is doing something for Ministers, while he must be aware that a large majority of Members want something to be done about their resettlement grant. Surely he should consider that as a matter of urgency.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not think it right to deal with that at the very beginning of my speech, as I am supposed to be dealing with the Bill. I am very much aware of the concern that is felt about the matter to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, and I intend to say something about it later, but I think that it would be better if I confined my initial remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I do not want to labour the point, but, as 351 hon. Members on both sides of the House signed the early-day motion, I would have expected the right hon. Gentleman to pay it due regard in his opening remarks.

May I ask whether it is incumbent on any Member, whether or not he is a Minister—or even Mr. Speaker—to participate in a debate on a Bill as a result of which he will benefit directly? Will the right hon. Gentleman, as a Minister, be entitled to receive any benefit as a result of the Bill, and will he specify who will receive such benefits?

Mr. MacGregor: I intend to cover the question of resettlement grants in my opening remarks, but I think that it is best for me to do so in an orderly fashion. We are taking the Bill and the motion together, and almost every Member will benefit in one way or another: if we excluded those who will do so, the debate would be very odd.

On behalf of the House, let me thank my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), for all his work. He did a great deal to bring us to the point that we have reached today. I am very pleased that he is present, and that I am able to say that to him.

As the House will recall, in July 1987 we invited the TSRB to undertake a review of the parliamentary pension scheme, the pensions of the Prime Minister, Speaker and Lord Chancellor and ministerial severance pay. When the TSRB reported in May 1988—let me stress that date—we made it clear in a written answer that we accepted the recommendations. Last January, the House debated that report, together with the Government Actuary's report on the parliamentary contributory pension fund laid before the House in 1989. The Bill implements those TSRB recommendations, together with a number of other items.

We are also making improvements to the parliamentary pension scheme through our regulation-making power under the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987. The improvements for Ministers and those for other Members need to be seen as a whole, but procedurally we shall be debating the regulations separately from the Bill. In line with the undertaking given by my predecessor as Leader of the House in May 1987, we have set down the regulations in draft so that Members have an opportunity to comment.

I shall, of course, say more about the regulations when we debate them. I will say now only that I believe that the improvements in the Bill and the regulations strike a fair balance between the interests of Ministers and those of other Members. I believe that I have the full support of the trustees in saying that.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I know that the Bill and the regulations are being taken separately, but surely it would be in the interests of the House for us to be able to debate both at the same time.

Mr. MacGregor: As it is the normal procedure, I intended first to speak to the Bill and deal with the resettlement grant, and then to deal with the details of the regulations when we reach them. I think that this is really a matter for the Chair.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My right hon. Friend has said that he is prepared to consider Members' views on the draft regulations. Can he give those of us who are former MEPs an assurance that he will examine the provision in the regulations, as they are currently drafted, that service as an MEP will not count towards the early-retirement provisions?

Mr. MacGregor: The MEP point is in the regulations, not the Bill. I will certainly deal with it, and I want to hear the views of hon. Members before I reply to the debate on the regulations. I think that that would be the right time, because the Bill deals with other matters.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): When it was suggested that both matters should be debated together, the right hon. Gentleman seemed to cast some doubt on the position. He said that it was a matter for the Chair, but, according to my interpretation of the procedure, it should depend on the will of the House; and, judging by the early-day motion referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), there is a strong feeling in the House that the two matters should be debated together.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Perhaps I can be of assistance. The House determined that the two matters should be taken separately, but a broad-brush approach would be helpful, as it would make a wide debate possible. I am sure that it would help hon. Members on both sides of the House if the Leader of the House were able to make some progress with his speech, as we would then know his intentions.

Mr. MacGregor: Let me make my intentions clear; then perhaps I shall be able to say something about the Bill. I intend to talk about the Bill on Second Reading, but I am aware that the issue of the resettlement grant is of great concern to the House. I suspect that that is the reason for this afternoon's sizeable attendance. I am also aware of the number of signatories to the early-day motion, and I therefore intend to talk about the matter in the current debate. It would probably be wise for me to deal separately with the many detailed points relating to the regulations; otherwise I might speak for rather a long time now, and I consider it important for hon. Members to have a chance to participate.

I intend to go briefly through the various items in the Bill. I shall speak at greater length on the points that are of interest especially to many Opposition Members.

Clause 1 makes changes to the statutory ex officio pensions paid to the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker and the Lord Chancellor. The Lord Chancellor has been entitled to a life pension since before 1830, while Mr. Speaker's pension until 1972, granted to each retiring Speaker personally by a special Act of Parliament, dates from 1832. The statutory pension for the Prime Minister dates from 1937. The justification for these special arrangements is the recognition of the high responsibilities of the three offices. The pensions are payable not out of the parliamentary contributory pension fund but out of the Consolidated Fund.

Arrangements for these pensions were consolidated in the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1972 which fixed the Prime Minister's pension at $\frac{1}{2}$ths, Mr. Speaker's at $\frac{20}{40}$ths and the Lord Chancellor at $\frac{17}{40}$ths of salary. These fractions have been maintained since then whenever salaries have been increased.

The TSRB in its 1988 report recommended that instead of the different pension ratios for each of the offices, current and future office holders should be entitled to pensions of one half of their final salary. Clause 1 therefore amends the 1972 Act so that the office holders all receive a common pension ratio of one half of final salary.

Currently there is a restriction on the pensions increase that may be paid to former office holders. For example, the basic pension of a former Prime Minister is uprated under the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971 until it reaches the level the incumbent Prime Minister would receive if he retired. At that point the pension is capped, and a former Prime Minister is entitled to no further pensions increase unless the Prime Minister's salary rises. This penalises former Prime Ministers who have not received the annual pensions increase uprating received by all other public sector pensioners. The TSRB recommended that this restriction should be lifted and we shall be laying regulations under the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971 to give effect to that recommendation. Taking that into account, and the previous operation of the capping restriction, we felt that we should take the opportunity in this Bill to set the pension level of all former Prime Ministers at the same figure as the present Prime Minister would be entitled to. Accordingly, clause 1(5) provides for this. That will be the basis on which the pension will henceforward be fully index-linked.

Clause 2 amends the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987 so that regulations may be made to permit the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker to participate in the parliamentary contributory pension fund. The TSRB argued that there was no good reason for the exclusion and that the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker should be given the option of participating. The TSRB concluded, however, that this participation should not operate retrospectively. The regulations will cover that point.

Clause 3 relates the salary of the Lord Chancellor to that of the Lord Chief Justice. The House may recall that the 1983 TSRB report recommended that the Lord Chancellor should receive a slight salary lead over the Lord Chief Justice in recognition of his role as head of the judiciary. The lead was established at £2,000 and remained at that level until last year. Each increase to the Lord Chancellor's salary currently requires a Lord Chancellor's salary order which is subject to an affirmative resolution of both Houses. To implement the salary lead in legislation will end the need for an annual order. I am sure the House will agree that that is sensible.

Clause 4 deals with the May 1988 TSRB recommendation that the severance payment scheme for Lords Ministers should be extended to other Ministers and paid office holders, with certain provisos. The TSRB recommended that on losing office, for whatever reason, Commons Ministers should receive a severance payment based on three months' net parliamentary income and that Ministers not in either House of Parliament should receive three months' ministerial salary—just as Lords Ministers already do. It also recommended that the two-year qualifying period for Lords Ministers should be dropped, that the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker should be excluded from these arrangements and that the Lord Chancellor should cease to be eligible because of preferential pension arrangements.

I believe that the justification for this will be well understood. Ministers are often required to relinquish outside appointments when they are appointed. That can often mean a substantial loss of income, in addition to a far busier working schedule.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The right hon. Gentleman says that he believes that the justification for this will be easily understood. May I disabuse him of that notion? No worker in my constituency will easily understand that when a Minister gets the sack his or her salary continues for another three months while the salaries of workers who are sacked stop there and then.

Mr. MacGregor: The TSRB recommended that and made it clear that it saw it as a severance payment scheme. That is what I believe it is.

On leaving office a Minister faces an immediate loss of income. It will normally take time to pick up the threads of a previous career, or in other ways to build up replacement income. The TSRB believed, and the Government agree, that modest severance payments are entirely reasonable to bridge the gap.

Clause 5 introduces a new allowance for Lords Ministers and paid office holders. For a number of years Governments have experienced difficulties in recruiting

and retaining Ministers and paid office holders from another place. One of the main reasons why peers have been unwilling to accept office has been the adverse financial pressures which ensue.

On appointment a Lords Minister or paid officer holder not only may suffer a fall in salary as a result of relinquishing outside appointments but he or she is also deprived of the overnight subsistence allowance that they could claim as a Back-Bench peer. At the same time most Ministers find it necessary to set up a London base, if they do not already live here, in order to meet the heavy demands of their jobs.

Under current arrangements, Ministers and paid office holders from both sides of another place receive no assistance towards running a second home in London. This is a long-standing anomaly which we propose to remedy by the introduction of a night subsistence allowance for Lords Ministers and paid office holders. In all cases it will replace the current London supplement. We propose that the allowance will be based on the overnight element of the peers' reimbursement allowance. We propose to increase the allowance in line with the Back-Bench peers' overnight allowance by Order in Council. We believe that the introduction of this new allowance will ease significantly the difficulty we have had in recruiting and retaining Lords Ministers in recent years.

The Bill makes no direct improvement to Members' pensions as such. These are being made by the regulations that we shall consider later this evening. However, clause 6 is of considerable relevance to Members' pension arrangements.

The House will recall that in 1989, following the Government Actuary's report on the parliamentary contributory pension fund, the Exchequer contribution was set at 4·4 per cent. while the Member contribution remained at 9 per cent. In the pensions debate last January, the strength of feeling in the House on the issue of the balance of contributions was made very clear, and my predecessor undertook to consider in what terms the matter should be referred to the TSRB. Following consultation with the trustees, but subject to the views of the House, I have agreed the terms of reference with the trustees. They were set out in my written answer of 24 January.

The House may find it helpful if I explain the background. Briefly, the Member contribution to the PCPF is set on the basis necessary to fund benefits over the long term, leaving aside surpluses and deficits. The Government Actuary's department, on the basis of the cost of those known benefits, values the scheme every three years. Since the Member contribution is fixed, the Government Actuary's department is able to stipulate the Exchequer contribution as a residual. The Government Actuary's department then takes account of any surplus or deficit in the fund and adjusts the Exchequer contribution accordingly to produce the rate actually paid. The effect is that the Exchequer funds deficits but, where there is a surplus, enjoys a contributions holiday. In other words, the Exchequer contribution is not a fixed item but varies, depending on the state of the fund. There is either a holiday or a reduction.

The trustees and others, however, take the view that the character of the scheme to which the Exchequer makes contributions in this way—taking the benefit of surpluses and making good any deficits—should be changed. They argue that it is wrong that the Exchequer contribution may on occasion be below the Member contribution. Their preference is for a system which has a fixed relationship between the Exchequer and Member contribution—say, in the ratio of 5:3 or 60:40.

One of the merits of the system is that Members enjoy known benefits for known contributions. If we are to make the changes that the trustees want, we need to be clear that Members' contributions would fluctuate possibly sharply and certainly unpredictably. Put simply, Members would lose the present stability and predictability of their contributions—in other words, the fixed price they enjoy for guaranteed benefits.

Now is not the time to discuss the substance of all this but it is clearly important to make clear the Government's position, which is that we believe that the system works fairly. However, I accept that there can be different points of view. I am aware of that and have been looking into it in considerable detail. So we have agreed to refer the matter to the TSRB.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Our contribution of 9 per cent. is the highest of any privately-funded pension scheme in the country and it should never have reached that position. When my right hon. Friend refers the matter to the TSRB, will he make it clear that it is not simply a matter of wanting to alter our contribution so that there can be flexible arrangements in the future, but that 9 per cent. is too high and should never have been the position? That is what the TSRB should be investigating.

Mr. MacGregor: I suspect that I do not have the same detailed knowledge of pension schemes elsewhere as my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). I am aware of his great knowledge of them. I cannot confirm precisely whether a 9 per cent. contribution is higher than that for any other scheme in the country. If I were to say so, and then discovered that that was not the case, no doubt people would write about it. However, I agree with my hon. Friend that in my knowledge it is a high contribution in comparison with other schemes.

Clearly, in referring this matter to the TSRB, it will be open to anyone, including the trustees, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham is a distinguished member, to make representations about the balance of contributions, the system and the points made by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Orme: May I underline the point made by the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern)? We have looked into the 9 per cent. contribution and compared it with the private and public sector. It is almost impossible to find anything comparable with our scheme. It is completely wrong. Members feel that it is a gross injustice and I hope that when the Leader of the House refers the issue to the TSRB, as he has rightly said that he will, he recommends that it looks seriously at the matter.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already explained in a written answer the way in which we are proposing to refer this to the TSRB. The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) knows that the terms of reference have already been agreed with the trustees. In fact, I made some changes to the terms of reference to incorporate recommendations of the trustees. I intend this to be a serious reference, as I do another matter that I shall come to. The TSRB will look

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at the views expressed in the debate and it will be open to the trustees and others to make their representations known.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): In referring the matter to the TSRB, what view will the Government express? Will they be suggesting, as my right hon. Friend appeared to a moment ago, that this is a fair system? If they do that, I do not think that they will carry the House with them.

Mr. MacGregor: Since the Government have put this scheme before the House, clearly we shall make clear why we did so and why we believe that the current scheme has certain merits. By referring the matter, the TSRB will be able to make up its mind about whether it wants to propose any changes. I want to make it clear to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) that I am doing so in order that the strong feelings in the House can be conveyed to the TSRB. I can go no further than that today.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I have been listening carefully to what the Lord President has had to say. He mentioned that the Government were a little fearful of the amount of finance involved in the fund. Some such things have been said in the past and the right hon. Gentleman almost said it today. The Government are more or less deciding their contribution to the pension fund and they feel that it should be smaller than it is now. Hon. Members are correct in their belief that 9 per cent. is far too high. Incidentally, during the passage of the Employment Bill I can remember the ex-Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) who is sitting below the Gangway, talking about pension funds outside the House and what workers should be doing to get into such funds. They were much better than the House of Commons fund.

I have not yet heard the Lord President refer to the people who have to carry out the job in the pensions office across the road after we have debated and decided on the regulations and so on. They do a first-class job in very difficult circumstances.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's final point and I intended to mention that later. However, I am happy to do so now.

I do not recall saying what the hon. Gentleman attributed to me at the beginning of his intervention about the finances of the fund. The TSRB recommended the current position. The Government accepted that and clearly believe that the scheme has been fair up to now. I am aware of the depth of feeling in the House because I have consulted widely before reaching this point and those feelings are clear from the reactions in the Chamber today. Therefore, I think that we are taking the right step by referring this to the TSRB so that it can be looked at again. It will enable all those who are putting points to me now to put the same points in detail to the TSRB.

Mr. Ray Powell: It has already been said that we did not have much of a hand in deciding that we would contribute 9 per cent. I have my salary slip, which all hon. Members will have received yesterday or today. My basic superannuation contribution is £217·28, and that is for my wife to know if no one else. With all due respect, during the five-week-per-month period I would be paying £43 or £44 a week and during the 10 four-week-per-month period I would be paying £52 a week. I have consulted organisations outside to see what benefits I would receive if I contributed to a private scheme. I was told that on all the benefits currently available to me as a Member of Parliament and those contained in the Bill I would receive nearly one quarter again. The TSRB should consider that anomaly. The contribution to the majority of occupational pension schemes is 4·4 per cent. by employees and 8·8 per cent. by employers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's deep concern, but this is an intervention, not a speech. Is the hon. Gentleman coming to his final point?

Mr. Powell: This is my final point. The Leader of the House mentioned 40 per cent. and 60 per cent., but he did not say who is paying 40 per cent. and who is paying 60 per cent. It is essential for us to know that.

Mr. MacGregor: In a debate such as this, the Leader of the House is in a slightly unusual position, because he is putting forward the position not only of the Government but of those who fund some part of our pension contributions—the taxpayer. We must have a mind to that and be fair about it.

Like the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), I received a pay slip yesterday. I, too, pay a Members' contribution of 9 per cent. I am aware of the points that the hon. Gentleman made, but we must be careful how we approach these matters, which is why it is right to ask the TSRB objectively to consider the argument that is being advanced and how outside schemes operate.

I mentioned ratios to make a distinction between the current system and one with fixed ratios, which is the preference of the trustees. Hon. Members can put their views to the TSRB, which will then make a decision.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The Minister has given an eccentric description of his job, which is why I suspect that he will not be a very good Leader of the House. His job is to represent Members of Parliament. It is the job of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to represent the taxpayer. In this instance, the right hon. Gentleman is not a member of the Executive but is representing the House.

Mr. MacGregor: That is what I am doing by putting this issue to the TSRB, with a recommendation and terms of reference that have been agreed with the trustees.

The Government will make clear what they see as some of the merits of the present system. It is perfectly clear that everyone will be entitled to put his own case. I know that the trustees will do so and hon. Members, too, will be free to put their views. It will then be for the TSRB to make recommendations. If it were to recommend a change in the present arrangements, it would then be for the Government to decide whether to put them before the House.

If, for example, the TSRB were to recommend, and the Government were to accept, a change to a fixed relationship between the Exchequer and the Member's contribution, that would require the Leader of the House to fix the Exchequer as well as the Member's contribution. I do not have that power and it would require new primary legislation.

I have recognised the force of the arguments—the trustrees will agree with me on this—that the parliamentary pension scheme would be unique in requiring primary legislation to make such a detailed change, and that pressures on the parliamentary timetable may delay such possibilities. Under clause 6, therefore, we shall amend the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987 to enable us to make changes by regulation if we are persuaded that the system should change. The House will note that the clause is permissive, but I hope that it will agree that this will be a more satisfactory arrangement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe (Surrey, East): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on having achieved that clause, for which I know the trustrees were pressing? He has been able to take advantage of his more recent association with Treasury officials than mine to coerce a healthy conclusion from that redoubtable organisation. He has been assisted by the fact that hon. Members have been pressing their case on him, as they are pressing him in early-day motion 299 on resettlement allowance.

There is a group that is not well represented in the House—about whom I have felt an uneasy conscience since the time when I held my right hon. Friend's office on behalf of whom my former Parliamentary Private Secretary intervened a moment ago: those who have combined service as Members of the European Parliament and Members of this House. Some have served here but are now serving in Europe, and vice versa. The salaries of MEPs were fixed precisely parallel to hon. Members' salaries to ensure parity. In one respect, that does not seem to apply—the benefit that they earn at the end of their service. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take that point seriously. I tried to take it seriously because I felt that it was being under-represented; there are few such creatures sitting on the Benches in the House. Apart from that, I congratulate him on his success. One last heave in respect of those poor fledglings in Strasbourg would be most helpful.

Mr. MacGregor: I am most grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. I hope that that shows that I take seriously my responsibilities as Leader of the House and have endeavoured to achieve the right solutions.

It would probably be best to discuss MEPs in the context of the regulations. It is rather a complex matter, as my right hon. and learned Friend will know, and I have been involved in tortuous examination of it in recent days. It might be best for me to listen to hon. Members and respond in detail later.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the regulation be debatable?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the hon. Gentleman means the regulation on MEPs. Today we will be debating the draft regulations. The Government will consider the points that are made and introduce regulations later.

The House should know that the GAD is working on the next valuation report, which is expected in the next couple of months. That will yield a new Exchequer contribution. Under the 1987 Act, any change in that contribution can come into effect only at the beginning of the financial year following publication. Thus, if the report were published in, say, late April, the new Exchequer contribution would not take effect until April 1992. My written answer suggested that the TSRB is being asked to report on this subject by this April. Following consultations on the practicalities of that with the chairman of the TSRB, I am persuaded that we shall have to give more time for the review to be undertaken properly. I propose that it should report as soon as possible—some time in May.

Hon. Members' reactions have shown that it will be necessary for the TSRB to consider much evidence and many representations, and no doubt it will wish to take oral evidence. Its chairman was probably right to say that it is better not to rush the reference and for it to consider all the evidence and to relax the timetable that I proposed in my written answer.

The important point for the House is that, even if the TSRB were to recommend change, and we accepted that, we would be in a position to take the necessary action well before April 1992. That is the important point. Any change to the Exchequer contribution in the forthcoming report of the GAD could therefore be included in any regulations made under clause 6. I hope that that reassures the House that there is now no question of a lack of power, nor any difficulty of timing.

I know that some hon. Members are keen that the TSRB should examine experience in other countries. As the House will have seen from my answer on 24 January, that is specifically mentioned in the letter that I shall send to the TSRB's chairman. It is only fair to warn the House, however, that because of the tight timescale I doubt that it will be possible for the TSRB to cover this aspect fully before May. That is one of the consequences that we must accept of trying to get the matter resolved as soon as possible.

Sir Peter Hordern: My right hon. Friend said that the Government Actuary would report in April and that he would report on the state of the fund as at April or May last year. He will report solely on the relative contributions between Members of Parliament and the Exchequer. What happens when the TSRB considers not only the balance of contributions, but improved benefits, with which the House is concerned, such as the suggestion for up to two thirds for widows? What happens when the TSRB then considers those matters, and reports favourably and recommends that such improvements should be made? Will there be time for the Government Actuary to see what the improvements will cost so that, using the procedure under clause 6, the House may carry forward the recommendation that should be made by the TSRB on the improvements that may be suggested by the House?

Mr. MacGregor: This is a complex matter, so I shall try to go through it with some care. I am anxious that the House should know the position and I do not want to mislead it. The reference to the TSRB is fundamentally on the point about the balance of contributions and whether the system should change. If the TSRB makes such a recommendation and the House accepts it, that will be a big change in the system. As a result of the timing of the next GAD report, there should be no problem about making the change, if that is what is eventually decided, in good time for April 1992 so that the automaticity of anything that the GAD report might say normally under our present arrangements would not apply. In other words, if we do not make a change in the system, there is the automatic effect of the GAD report in April 1992 under our present arrangements. I am satisfied that if we

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want to make a change under these proposals—and with the suggested timing—to the TSRB, there will be time to take that into account and that automaticity, if that is how it worked out, would not follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham knows well from his discussions, especially with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East on the changes to these benefits and to the benefits that we shall discuss later, that discussions also took place between the Leader of the House and the trustees. The benefit changes were agreed, and we are now putting them to the House and seeking its agreement. That process could, no doubt, continue, but it would be concurrent with and not part of the change to the overall scheme.

I must warn, as I mentioned earlier, that every change in benefits that relates entirely to a surplus—if there is one—in the last valuation carries through. If there is a change in the valuation subsequently and the surplus disappears, those benefits will still be there, but will have to be paid for. That is where, in a fixed contribution scheme, the contributions might have to rise. I hope that I have given my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham a clear answer.

Perhaps it would be appropriate for me to say something now on the resettlement grant which is the subject of early-day motion 299. The House will be aware that this grant is paid directly from the House of Commons vote and has, therefore, nothing to do with the parliamentary pension fund nor, indeed, with the Bill. Hon. Members will also recall that the TSRB examined the question of the cut-off at age 65 in its last report, the recommendations of which we are now implementing, and that it recommended no changes in the resettlement grant. But the Government must obviously take very seriously an expression of such widespread concern from hon. Members of all parties. I can, therefore, tell the House that we agree that the TSRB should be invited to look again urgently at this matter.

I shall be drawing to the TSRB's attention the strength of feeling in the House that the arguments bear re-examination, especially in view of the unique circumstances which determine the precise timing of the end of a Parliament and therefore, for some hon. Members, the end of a parliamentary career. The trustees were anxious that the TSRB should consider the matter seriously, with an open mind and in a way that ensures that the arguments can be put before it clearly and to the satisfaction of all concerned. I give the House the clear assurance that I will put the request to the TSRB on that basis.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): It is pretty obvious from the number of people here today who are aged well over 50 that they are concerned about the retirement age. Is not it a further disgraceful anomaly that an hon. Member aged 48 or 49 who has done 15 years' service in the House still gets only six months' severance pay when it is virtually impossible for him to go back to his job? This will not affect me or many of my colleagues, but it will affect Conservative Members, who could lose their seats even through a boundary change.

The Leader of the House proposes that Ministers should receive three months' redundancy pay after having had possibly only two years in a ministerial job. They will not be unemployed because they will go back to a Back-Bencher's salary. In the past, many hon. Members have done 15 years and have lost their seat at the age of 48 or 49, yet they have received only six months' redundancy pay. Surely severance pay should be tied to length of service and, of course, those who serve over the age of 65 must also be considered. Length of service should be tied to severance pay as well as there being a birthday cut-off at the age of 50.

Mr. MacGregor: There is a length of service tie-in. As the hon. Gentleman will know, it applies equally to hon. Members of all parties. I have been referring to early-day motion 299 about which the House is expressing concern. That is why I suggest that the right thing for the House to do is to refer the matter to the TSRB, expressing clearly the strength of concern and asking the TSRB to consider the matter again.

I also recognise that there is concern that the TSRB should report as quickly as possible so that appropriate action may be taken in a timely way. I have, therefore, agreed with the TSRB that I will ask it to report separately on the resettlement grant by the middle of April. I have every reason to believe and expect that the TSRB can meet that demanding time scale. I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in expressing our thanks to the TSRB for its readiness to deal with these complex and important matters—and especially with early-day motion 299—so speedily.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I declare an interest in that I should be affected by any change here and in that I am now over 70.

When the Leader of the House talks to the TSRB, will he point out that it is no use comparing this pension scheme with a normal one? I mentioned my age. Many of my friends have now been retired for five years. Whether they were in banking, in teaching or anywhere else, they retired at a set age. They realise that a number of hon. Members are over 65 and that it is a different scene.

Some of us may come here at a later age. Parliaments run over a four-year period. People outside sometimes get the wrong end of the stick and compare our jobs with jobs outside. That is why the magic figure of 65 has been used. Will the Leader of the House point out to the TSRB that it should look at the different nature of work here?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman's point will be raised by a number of those who make representations to the TSRB. My role as Leader of the House and on behalf of the Government is to say that we shall put these points to the TSRB, and ask it to look at them seriously and in the way that I described a few moments ago. However, my personal view—as I said a moment ago—is that we are in unique circumstances and have a unique job. I agree with the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) that our position is different.

When Members of Parliament enter a new Parliament, they take a decision for themselves, but they cannot be certain when their employment will terminate. The TSRB should be asked to consider that point, which I recognise.

I should like finally to turn to clause 7, which makes some changes to the Members' fund. This is a statutory fund, administered by trustees, which is able to offer grants to former Members of Parliament or their dependants who experience financial difficulties. It is usual to make changes to the fund from time to time.

The House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 has in particular a hardship provision which permits the trustees,

"for the purpose of alleviating special hardship"

to make such

"payments as they think fit".

This section has not been reviewed for a long time and it seemed right to us and the trustees that we should bring the wording more up to date and, in doing so, cast the trustees' discretion more widely. Under the Bill there will now be no doubt about the trustees' discretion to act where,

"having regard to the circumstances of the persons to . . . whom the payments are to be made",

they judge it right. The decisions on what payments to make and to whom will, of course, be for the trustees alone.

The financial implications of the Bill are small, and are contained in the explanatory and financial memorandum. I should also tell the House, however, that, under Statutory Instrument 1981/748, there is provision for the Treasury to pay to the separate Members' fund up to £215,000 per annum. Currently, £115,000 per annum is made available to that fund. It seemed right to us that, at a time when we were changing the trustees' discretion, we should make the extra £100,000 per annum available, and we propose to do so.

All these matters have been considered extensively by the TSRB, and by the Government in discussion with the trustees and others. The measures in the Bill and in the draft regulations which we shall be considering later today together form a package with which the trustees are content. In view of the lengthy consultations, and because the beneficiaries of these modest and overdue changes include the widows of a number of colleagues who are sadly no longer with us, I hope that the House will agree to support the Bill, and that we can thereafter make rapid progress with its remaining stages. I commend the Bill to the House.

6 pm

Mr. Stan Orme (Salford, East): The Bill deals with ex-Ministers and office-holders and, to that extent, its provisions are limited. The proposals are modest, but hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that it would have been wrong to proceed with the Bill without discussing other matters affecting Members of Parliament, and those matters should therefore be dealt with this evening.

I hope to speak only once, and it may therefore be helpful for the Leader of the House to hear the Opposition's views on the regulations with which he will deal later this evening.

I thank the Leader of the House for the manner in which he has introduced the Bill, and I want to put on record the fact that there has been a great deal of consultation and discussion involving the trustees—not least my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who has played a prominent part. I represented the parliamentary Labour party in those discussions, and I know that other hon. Members have represented their respective parties. We have been trying to resolve outstanding problems regarding hon. Members' contributions and benefits under the pension scheme.

The proposals are extremely modest—certainly when considered against the background of conditions in other Parliaments in Europe, the Commonwealth and the United States. It is worth putting it on record that the House of Commons turned its mind to proper provision for Members of Parliament and their dependants under a contributory scheme only in 1964. We have since had to build on that scheme. Improvements have been made, and further improvements are contained in the Bill and the regulations. Nevertheless, in certain areas, progress has been painful and slow—not least in respect of widows and dependants. The House has seen the tragic consequences of that in recent years.

We welcome the improvements that have been made—and certainly some of the improvements outlined in the regulations attached to the Bill. The fact that the Leader of the House has seen fit to introduce the regulations alongside the Bill shows that he recognises the importance that hon. Members attach to the proposals. Many hon. Members have already told the right hon. Gentleman that their concern is to see justice done. We want nothing other than justice. We want what we are entitled to; we do not want anything more, and we certainly do not want anything less. That point must be made very clearly.

The Leader of the House has told us that clause 6 provides the power for the holder of his post to make regulations altering the amount of the Exchequer's contribution to the fund. It is extremely important that that provision should be included in the Bill because, if the Top Salaries Review Body makes proposals for changing the contribution ratio, the right hon. Gentleman must have the basis on which to make those changes. The right hon. Gentleman's anticipation of that eventuality is a mark of his good will towards the House.

We must make it clear to the TSRB that it is totally unsatisfactory to have the Treasury contribution reduced to 4·4 per cent. while Members of Parliament are now to pay 9 per cent. I gave evidence to the body when it last discussed the matter and I made that case strongly.

At that time, of course, we did not realise that the Government Actuary would recommend 4·4 per cent. The Government Actuary has the power to re-examine the Treasury contribution. When he saw that the fund had reached a high level, he reduced that contribution to 4·4 per cent. The problem is that he has no power to examine hon. Member's contributions, and that is absolute nonsense. When I was Minister of State for Social Security, I examined pension funds and I know that the trustees of the pension fund of a large firm such as ICI would never have tolerated such a state of affairs.

I do not think that the Top Salaries Review Body fully understood the arguments that were put on the last occasion. The body takes evidence, and it is incumbent on hon. Members to stress the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees)—that the employment of hon. Members is unique. I welcome the recommendations made by the Leader of the House, who has gone as far as he can in telling the TSRB to take a fresh look at the matter and come forward with proposals.

I welcome, too, the new proposals regarding an hon. Member who reaches maximum pension after 30 years' service and is still under the age of 65. At present, if he or she completes 30 years' service before the age of 55, he or she continues to pay full contributions between the ages of 55 and 65 and is in effect, paying in for no gain. That is nonsense. The removal of that anomaly is welcome, and does no more than bring Members of Parliament into line

[Mr. Stan Orme]

with employees in the public and private sectors. We in this place do not take the lead in these matters; indeed, in many respects, we are lagging far behind.

That matter is linked with the question of early retirement. At present, if hon. Members take early retirement, their pension is payable when they reach the age of 65 or when they have done 20 years' service. If the Member of Parliament is over the age of 60 at a general election, he or she can receive an immediate unabated pension. Under the proposed new arrangements, if an hon. Member retires before the age of 60, as long as the required number of years has been reached, he or she will be able to claim a pension without having to wait to attain the age of 65. That is another small, but important and long overdue, adjustment.

Turning to widows', widowers' and children's pensions, there has been a long and protracted argument over this issue, as the Leader of the House knows only too well. There is strong feeling that the pension rights of widows and widowers should be two thirds of the allowable pension instead of one half. There have been instances —these have been put before the House on a number of occasions—of hon. Members who have died on a small pension, because they have only been here for a limited time, when the widow and family have received a pittance and have had to rely on charitable contributions from one or other side of the House. That must be rectified.

Therefore, although the move to five eighths is a step in the right direction, I agree with the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) that that should not be the final answer. We should aim to get the TSRB to agree at some future date that it should be two thirds of the allowable pension. That is a justifiable amount, and we should press for it very strongly indeed.

The increase in the death gratuity is overdue and very welcome. The increase is to two years of gross salary paid to the spouse of the deceased, the widow or the widower, and is back-dated to 1988. This is very welcome, but, again, it is only in line with standard practice.

There have been untimely deaths on both sides of the House. I do not need to stress to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we have had some very bitter blows in recent months and years. We have seen families riven by grief because of the untimely deaths of younger Members of the House.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I think it is worth while putting it on the record that widows have to put up not only with their grief but also sometimes with the intrusion of the press and the rest of the media trying to find out who the successor to the seat will be. They often also have to see their late husband's photographs on television just when they are trying to get over a terrible grief.

Mr. Orme: That is one of the extra burdens that one has to bear if one is a Member of the House.

We very much welcome the fact that this recommendation is to be implemented.

I want to deal very briefly with the question of the regulations for future Members of the European Parliament, who will be able to transfer their pension rights from the European Parliament scheme to the House of Commons scheme, where they will be counted as added years. That is very much welcomed. However, those hon. Members who serve in the House and who have previously served in the European Parliament feel very aggrieved that the proposed new scheme does not apply to them. Will the Minister take a further look at this issue?

A similar situation should also appertain when an hon. Member becomes a Member of the European Parliament. It should be reciprocal. The MEPs are not asking for anything different. They pay to the pension scheme within the European Parliament, and they are on the same salary as we are. All they are asking is that, when they transfer that money, it should be counted as added years. This is a small but, I think, justifiable point.

Speeches tonight have shown how strongly we feel on the resettlement grant. Hon. Members feel that there is a great deal of injustice here. The resettlement grant is for Members who have left the House of Commons, to allow them to make modest adjustments in their home and living conditions. With a cut-off age of 65, it has become a lottery whether one's birthday falls just before a general election or just after it. There are a number of examples of hon. Members who have missed this by a very short period, even days, and also of hon. Members who have gained. As we have no fixed dates for general elections but are dependent on when the Government, irrespective of what party forms the Government, call an election, the unfairness is aggravated.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I agree whole-heartedly with the right hon. Gentleman. On the question of hon. Members who gain, is he aware of the case of one of our colleagues, no longer in the House, who was consulted by Prime Ministers as to the date of an election? He was in a difficult position, because whatever advice he gave would benefit or disadvantage him. That shows the absurdity of the present system.

Mr. Orme: That is true, and the lottery must be removed. There is a justifiable case. As the House knows, and as the Leader of the House has acknowledged, 351 hon. Members have signed a motion to this effect. They feel extremely strongly about it. It is worth putting it on record that only a small number of hon. Members are involved, but the injustice is seen as great.

I therefore welcome the fact that the Leader of the House has referred this to the TSRB in as strong language as it is possible for him to use at this stage. I hope that he will impress on the TSRB the fact that hon. Members see this as a matter of natural justice and that it is important that we have a reply as soon as possible, so that any proposals can be implemented before the next general election.

I believe, therefore, that the proposals before us this evening—limited, modest, but important—are a step in the right direction. It is not the end of the problem; we have not resolved all the outstanding issues; but certainly we are making progress. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the Bill and the regulations this evening.

6.16 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Pensions are an acquired taste. I remember that when the state earnings-related pension scheme was introduced in 1975 there were only about a dozen hon. Members present in the House. I mention that to make two points. First, pensions policy generally has been a long-standing interest

of mine—and it is not just my own pension that I am interested in. Secondly, I speak as one of a select band of ex-Thatcher-Cabinet Members who are not retiring at the next election.

A flicker of suspicion crosses my mind when a Government put on a Bill such as this late on a Thursday, with private business at 7 o'clock, and in the middle of a war. My fears are semi-allayed by what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has said. I support entirely what he says about settlement grants, but I am bound to say that I am less than overwhelmed by the arguments for severance payments for Ministers.

I suppose that publicly the most controversial part of this Bill is clause 1, which gives half-pay pensions to anyone who reaches, for however short a period, the position of Prime Minister, Speaker or Lord Chancellor. I would not oppose that. It follows precedent, as my right hon. Friend has said. These offices have been treated differently previously, and this proposal manages to rationalise the position. It is generous, but, as far as those offices are concerned, justifiable.

My concern is the contrast with the positions of other Ministers and the position of hon. Members generally. To take the Ministers first, the Lord Chancellor's is an important post but not, perhaps, the most dominating post in the Cabinet. Others have more influence: Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, deputy Prime Minister, Home Secretary—posts of that kind. They are covered by the supplementary ministerial pensions scheme. Estimates are difficult, but it would take a Cabinet Minister of that kind, or indeed any other Cabinet Minister, about 20 years of service in the Cabinet to reach a half-pay pension. It is hardly necessary for me to say that not many hon. Members, in our experience, serve 20 years in the Cabinet.

What about a Member of Parliament? Under our provisions, it would take him 25 years to reach a half-pay pension, and that is on the new basis of accruals of one fiftieth rather than the old basis of one sixtieth. Of course, that came into being only in 1983. Most hon. Members will be covered by most of the one-sixtieth provision, and only partly covered by the one-eightieth provision.

Whatever else, I do not believe that Ministers and Members of Parliament generally can be attacked for having unbelievably generous pension arrangements, but what really sticks in the throat is the basis upon which those pensions are financed—the reason for clause 6. The Member scheme is a funded scheme. That means contributions from Members and from the Treasury. It used to be the case that the Treasury contributed 18 per cent. and Members contributed 9 per cent. However, over the past few years, like every other funded scheme in the country, there has been a good surplus. That has resulted in Members' contributions remaining at 9 per cent. but the Treasury's contribution going down from 18 per cent. to 4·4 per cent.

I remember something about Government being a model employer. The Government have taken a pension holiday which is extremely difficult to justify. I do not believe that it can be justified, nor do I believe that that is the sort of thing that the Government should be about in terms of pensions policy. Their case is that the 4·4 per cent. is what the Government Actuary says is necessary to finance and fund the scheme. That may be true as an actuarial calculation, but it does not mean for one moment that we should believe that everything within the scheme now is desirable or cannot be improved. For example, the position of widows could be improved, to the benefit of everyone concerned. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take on board what I detect to be the feeling on that subject, particularly in respect of widows. Changes in the financing of the scheme are urgently required. The position until now has been rather shabby and not something in which the Government should be involved.

Obviously, I welcome clause 6. I would welcome it even more if my right hon. Friend would go a little further in what he sets out as the Government's policy and the evidence that he will give to the TSRB. I am delighted to know about his powers to do that, but I should be interested to know even more about the matter. However, clause 6 allows the Leader of the House, with the consent of the Treasury, to make provision for determining the Exchequer contribution. It calls for consultations with the trustees. Again, that is obviously an important thing to do. Also, it calls for consultations with persons appearing to the Leader of the House of Commons to represent persons likely to be affected by the regulations on which he has consulted, other than the trustees themselves. Again, that is an important point.

Not everyone will want to be in the House of Commons scheme. There are now new pension options. For example, there are personal pensions, which in many ways were designed for people who might change jobs. Someone who enters the House with a majority of 300—I do not care on what side of the House—is not necessarily going to look forward to 30 years' uninterrupted service on the Benches of the House of Commons. It is important that the position of personal pensions is understood.

What does a generous Exchequer do? Of course, it pays the national insurance contribution that is required by law, but, apart from that, as the employer it makes no extra contribution whatsoever. The Treasury's touching support for the Government's policy of extending choice in pensions is to do the absolute minimum that the law allows. In other words, it does absolutely nothing. The Treasury needs to be made aware of that point and to understand that the law has changed, even if some of the views upon it may not have done so.

The trustees are concerned first and foremost about the fund, and that is right. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House must take into account other interests as well. He really must impress upon the Treasury and upon his colleagues the fact that there are now new options, that the law has changed, and that hon. Members may want to exercise those options, just as much as people outside would wish to do so.

The Bill is rather incomplete. It deals with some problems but ignores others. It should be recognised that Members of Parliament have a right to good and sensible pension arrangements made for them, and, above all, that we do not allow the Treasury to rule the scheme. That would be disastrous. A few years ago, I carried out a national review of pension arrangements. I hope that my right hon. Friend will conduct his own review of pensions for Ministers and Members of Parliament. There is a great deal left to improve in our system.

6.25 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): After that withering criticism of the Treasury, I rise to speak as chairman of the managing trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund. In that capacity, the House will

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

expect me to give the views of the trustees on the Government's proposals as set out in the Bill. As trustees, selected by right hon. and hon. Members as a whole to manage the fund, my colleagues and I, from both sides of the House, try our best to improve its provisions in the interests both of hon. Members, past and present, and their dependants. We have taken a leading role in securing many improvements in the scheme over the years, including a faster accrual rate, the age—service conditions for early retirement at a general election, and the provision for ill-health retirement pensions.

As I made clear in our last debate on parliamentary pensions on 17 January 1990, however, there remained a very strong case for further improvements. This debate, more than a year later, breaks all known records for frequency of postponement and, regrettably, although the Bill provides for some improvements long advocated by the trustees, it does not meet all our aims—in particular, our very strongly held view that the scheme will remain most seriously flawed until the injustice of a Member's contribution of 9 per cent., compared with one from the Treasury of only 4·4 per cent., is redressed.

Anyone who thinks that the House of Commons puts the interests of hon. Members first should look at that comparison and the failure, over a protracted period, to bring it more into line with the average of contributions paid by employees and employers in occupational pension schemes generally. According to the latest survey I have of occupational pension schemes, by the National Association of Pension Funds, employees in the United Kingdom contribute 4·4 per cent. towards the cost of their pensions and employers 8·8 per cent. So in the United Kingdom as a whole, employers pay twice as much as employees whereas, in our scheme, hon. Members pay more than twice as much as the Treasury.

I must remind right hon. and hon. Members that the initial steps towards the improvements for which the Leader of the House is now providing were taken as long ago as May 1987, when we debated the Bill which became the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987. That Act allowed for the amendment of the rules governing Members' pension arrangements by secondary legislation. Draft regulations under the 1987 Act will be considered later this evening in relation to the TSRB's latest report. However, we still await consolidated regulations, which is a matter that I raised with the Leader of the House for the trustees at a recent meeting with him.

In the debate on the Second Reading of the 1987 Act, strong pressure was exerted by Members, notably on the rate of their contributions and the level of benefits. In consequence, the then Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), agreed to refer the parliamentary contributory pension fund to the Top Salaries Review Body, as reported in the *Official Report* of 24 July 1987, column 502. The TSRB's report was published in May 1988, since when the trustees of the fund have discussed them, at innumerable meetings, with three successive Leaders of the House: the right hon. Members for Colchester, South and Maldon, for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) and for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor).

With all of them, the trustees pressed the claims which were set out to the House in my speech of 17 January 1990. I know that all three right hon. Members sought and, indeed, helped to close the gap between us, and that the Bill that we are debating would have been much less satisfactory but for their efforts. It must be emphasised that the present Leader, within days of his appointment, made plain his readiness to help in every way possible and that at least one important change to the Bill, as originally drafted, owes a very great deal to his responsive attitude to our representations.

The Bill now includes a clause which will enable the House to express an opinion and, indeed, to reject any proposal by the Leader to vary the Exchequer-Member contribution ratio which appears unreasonable to the House. The clause does not guarantee a debate. The House will be unable to act unless the Leader tables a proposal and I hope very much that he will go as far as he possibly can in this debate to assure us that it will be his firm purpose, and must also be that of his successors, to provide parliamentary time on an amendable motion to enable the House to state its views whenever the interests of Members are affected by any question on which he can act by making a proposal under the clause. Not to do so will merely increase dissatisfaction with the present imbalance as between ministerial and parliamentary control over the scheme. For the moment, however, I wish to thank the right hon. Gentleman for going further in this matter than any of his predecessors were able to go.

Mr. Ray Powell: I am rather concerned about the TSRB and its responsibility. Can my right hon. Friend satisfy me and other right hon. and hon. Members that, if the TSRB rejected what the House suggested to it, the avenue open to hon. Members, particularly on resettlement grant, would be to take action in the House by a majority of the House—351 hon. Members out of 650 who could attend the House and sign an early-day motion, perhaps excluding Ministers and a few others—appending their signatures to an early-day motion? At least, if the TSRB rejected our suggestion, we could take action. Will my right hon. Friend assure me and others that that will be possible?

Mr. Morris: Ultimately the power to decide rests with this House. The Treasury has enormous control over Ministers, yet we need help from them. Further to my hon. Friend's comments, I must tell the Leader of the House that I believe the pressure for change as far as resettlement grant is concerned is now becoming totally irresistible.

Very clearly, as I know the right hon. Gentleman accepts, it would have been preferable if the regulations on the Order Paper could have been laid before now, but I have been given assurances, which are reflected in the regulations, that some of the improvements and amendments for which they provide will apply as if they had been laid when they were first agreed between Leaders of the House and the trustees.

In the debate on 17 January 1990, there was wide support for improving the benefits of the scheme. At the same time, concern was again expressed about the Exchequer-Member contribution ratio. That concern was reinforced by the publication of the Government Actuary's report on the valuation of the fund as at 31 March 1987, showing a surplus of £7·4 million. Today there is even stronger feeling, as I hear daily from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, that urgent action must be taken to redress the balance. What

the Bill demonstrates is that the trustees' representations to successive Leaders of the House have produced some improvements in benefits, not least for widows, and in the pace of progress towards a more acceptable balance between Members' and Exchequer contributions to the Fund.

While I must again emphasise that we have not achieved all that we had hoped for, Members will see that there are real improvements in the Bill. If the trustees had been the sole arbiters, these improvements would have been at once more substantial and of quicker effect; but the House must recognise that the extent of our power to change the scheme is limited. As of now, we have the power to recommend, but not the authority to act executively, in relation either to benefits or the level of contributions to the scheme. That basically is why the parliamentary scheme still compares unfavourably with others in terms of the proportion of the scheme's costs paid for by its Members and of the benefits that it provides.

One of the most important changes provided for by the Bill is the increase in the rate of pensions payable to widows to five eighths, rather than the current half rate. It is less than the two thirds that the trustees argued for. Nevertheless, it is a welcome step forward. As the Leader of the House knows, under the current Inland Revenue rules, the maximum widow's pension that may be paid is two thirds of her husband's pension. The trustees asked that the surplus in the fund, shown by the Actuary's report, should be used to increase the widow's pension to the rate acceptable to the Inland Revenue. We won only half a loaf, however, and I give notice now that there will be further strong pressure for a two-thirds widow's pension.

Anyone who thinks that such pressure is uncalled for should look at some of the pensions now in payment to the widows of former Members of Parliament. At his death in 1984, the widow of a former colleague, and very close friend of mine, with total service of some 20 years, was entitled to barely £50 a week. That is but one example of the way in which the widows of former Members have fared and why Sir Anthony Kershaw, formerly the Member for Stroud, said here on 27 April 1987:

"It is an absolute disgrace that this should be tolerated . . . even to speak of it ought to give one a sense of shock."—[*Official Report*, 28 April 1987; Vol. 115, c. 104.]

Some of the regulations on the Order Paper will apply with effect from 6 April 1988. In one case, the effect will be to provide an increase in benefit for widows or widowers of hon. Members who have died since that time. It will be clear to hon. Members that a large number of widows and dependants will not, however, benefit from the rise, including the widow of my colleague and friend who died in 1984.

To help in meeting the problems that can arise, I am glad the Government have agreed that measures may be taken, under the extension of the Members' Fund Acts, to allow the trustees to relieve any hardship for widows or widowers who lost their husbands or wives before April 1988. The trustees have been told that the question of retrospection is difficult. We accept that it is clearly logical to have April 1988 as the date of automatic entitlement to the higher pension of five eighths but the possibility of any extra help for those whose husbands died before then will become available only after regulations to amend the Members' Fund Acts have come into force. The House will know that I speak in the debate also as chairman of the managing trustees of the House of Commons Members' Fund.

In relation to other improvements, I turn to one for which the trustees have pressed for some years: to allow Members to cease payment of contributions when entitlement to a maximum pension of two thirds of salary has been achieved. Members in this position now have to continue paying a 9 per cent. contribution without gaining any increase in their pension rights. Happily the regulations referred to on the Order Paper now provide for them to retain a notional holding within the fund without the deduction of further contributions, so the wholly reasonable case made by the trustees is now conceded. On a technical but important point, I must also thank the Leader of the House for including the necessary powers to allow the trustees formally to appoint investment agents, as required under the Financial Services Act 1986.

Further improvements, which result from pressure by the trustees and recommendations contained in the 26th report of the TSRB, include an increase in the death-in-service gratuity from one year's salary to twice the annual salary of a Member. I am naturally very glad to note that, in keeping with the trustees' request, this will be backdated to 1 May 1988, thus covering all deaths in service during the present Parliament, of which there has been a tragic number.

There are also improvements in the Bill for the provision of pensions on early retirement. Under the present system, the entitlement is determined at the point at which the Member leaves the House. There is then a sharp cut-off so that, for example, a Member with 20 years' service, who leaves just before his or her 60th birthday, is under severe disadvantage compared to one who leaves just after the age of 60. The new arrangements provide much more flexibility; and I commend them to Members on behalf of the trustees.

The regulations on this will also allow for service in the European Parliament to count towards the qualifying period. Here I need to ask the Leader of the House, on behalf of the trustees, if he can give any assurance that the change will be reciprocated in the parallel European parliamentary scheme. I fully understand the concern of former MEPs who feel that they are seriously disadvantaged by the Government's decision not to make retrospective the provision for counting their service as MEPs in relation to early retirement. The trustees have had many and strong representations from former MEPs on this vexed issue. We played our part in ensuring that they were drawn urgently to the attention of successive Leaders of the House. We did not, however, and do not now, have the power of decision in the matter; and, as the House knows, the Government, in holding the line against retrospection, feel that they cannot go, as it were, the extra mile.

I stress again also my understanding, and that of my fellow trustees, of the extent of feeling, in all parts of the House, about the serious imbalance between Members' contributions to the fund and those of the Exchequer. The mechanism for determining what is paid into the fund, agreed as long ago as 1972, was essentially to ensure that the Member's contribution would be fixed and the Exchequer's contribution would vary in such a way as to keep the fund at a viable level to meet its pension liabilities.

What this means in practice is that when, as a result of good management by the trustees, the assets of the fund

[Mr. Morris]

increase, the Exchequer contribution is decreased and the Treasury benefits rather than Members or pensioners. The absurd situation has now been reached whereby, I repeat, Members contribute over twice as much as the Exchequer to the fund, while outside the House the average employer pays twice as much as the employee to his occupational pension scheme.

Some aspects of the Bill are outside the responsibilities of the trustees: for example, severance pay for Ministers. That innovation stems from a recommendation by the TSRB on which the Government have resolved to act in the interests of right hon. and hon. Members who lose ministerial office. Another issue that is outside the trustees' terms of reference is that of the resettlement grant, to which both my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and the Leader of the House referred, for Members who lose their seats or otherwise leave Parliament at a general election. I am, of course, aware of how resentful Members are about the manifest inequities of the present rules for payment of the grant. Indeed, as the House knows, I sought recently to reflect the strength of feeling on the issue by tabling a motion which attracted 336 signatories, a clear majority of the House, on the day it was tabled.

It was more than a modest start, but the motion now has still more signatories, from both sides of the House, and I have had numerous messages from Members, not least Conservative Members, who would have signed had they not been inhibited from doing so by the offices they hold. Thus the number of signatories of the motion, huge and unprecedented though it may be, is well below the total support for its purposes.

The grant is not, of course, a severance payment or one for redundancy. As its name says, it is a resettlement grant, for people with two places of work when they retire from the House. As of now, there is a pot luck element in the rules for the grant. One former Cabinet Minister received the grant—a year's salary—because the last general election was called just before his 65th birthday, while others less fortunate, but some with over 30 years' service, received nothing because they were just over 65.

The motion would make the grant payable, subject to a minimum length of service rule, unless the Member stands for election after his or her 65th birthday. There is also provision for payment, at any age, to Members with long service to the House. This is in recognition of the resettlement problems of Members with long service, many of whom have to uproot from their homes because they can no longer afford to live in London on their incomes as pensioners.

I remind the House that there has been only one general election since the rules were made, and that it was not until afterwards that the inequities of the rules became apparent. The grant is, however, payable from the Consolidated Fund, not from the parliamentary pension scheme, and it will be for the House to remove, as I hope it very soon will, the undoubted injustices which its Members see in the current rules.

To conclude, I place on record, on behalf of the trustees, and indeed all Members and their dependants, our warmly renewed appreciation of the quiet and often unseen but painstaking and always caring work of Jim Dobson, Tony Lewis and all who help to administer the scheme. They go far beyond the calls of duty in the service they provide, and they deserve the gratitude of the House as a whole.

6.47 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): As a trustee of the fund, I am grateful for the hard work which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has done as chairman, on behalf of the House. Thanks to the extent and comprehensive nature of his remarks, there are many matters on which I shall not have to follow him.

I should like to stress one point at the start. There may be some outside the House who believe that we are discussing improvements in benefit for which the taxpayer will have to pay. It is important to stress that ours is a funded scheme, which means that we make contributions to it and that improvements in benefit come from improvements to the fund and its performance. That is unlike the great majority of public sector schemes which are wholly funded by the taxpayer. Indeed, the measures which we are discussing will result in a smaller contribution from the taxpayer than has been the case in the past. I make no apology for saying that the benefits which we are considering are in themselves not only worthy but arise from the efforts of the fund and those who manage it to secure better benefits, which we fully deserve.

For that reason, however, I do not think it right to compare our scheme and the benefits which we have as Members of Parliament with schemes in other countries, tempting though it would be to do so, because I believe that those schemes are generally funded by taxpayers who must take the responsibility for them. But if ours is to remain a funded scheme, which it should, we must expect the benefits that flow from it and no others.

It would not be right for us to recommend and carry into being improvements in our own scheme. They must be sent to the TSRB which, after careful consideration and having made its recommendations, should allow the Leader of the House to bring them before the House, as is proposed in clause 6.

These matters have been referred to the TSRB in the past and on three separate occasions they have suggested that the contributions made should be in the proportion of three eighths from Members and five eighths from Government. I see no reason why that proportion should ever have been altered. It was only because the TSRB understood it to be the wish of the House that we should make a contribution of 9 per cent. I do not wish to go into the antecedents of that decision. Apart from anything else, I do not have the time. I say only that it was a scratched-up deal done rather late at night and most unworthy of us. I hope that, when the TSRB looks at the matter again, it will forget that 9 per cent. and look at the matter squarely on its merits, as should be the case.

As a result of that, not only do we pay 9·9 per cent., but the Government contribution, because of the health of the fund and the way in which it has performed, has been reduced to 4·4 per cent.—somewhat less than half the rate that Members contribute. That is the case not just for one or two years—many schemes in the private sector take a contributions holiday for a year or two. This idea is to have 4·4 per cent. for no fewer than eight years while we continue to pay double. That is a most extraordinary state of affairs which must be addressed carefully. It simply

cannot be right. Therefore, it has been arranged—I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on doing so—that the TSRB will recommend whatever the appropriate contribution should be. In my opinion, our contribution should be nearer 6 per cent. at most and the Treasury's 8 per cent., rising to 14 per cent. in seven years' time.

However, there is now a new factor in the equation because there is to be a new valuation of the assets in the fund as at June last year. That valuation should show a further substantial surplus and, because the Government Actuary has no power to do anything else, we might have to say that because of that substantial surplus the Treasury contribution should be reduced to nothing while we continue to pay 9 per cent. I dare say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would have your support in saying that that arrangement would be unacceptable. Therefore, it is not enough simply to say what the balance of contribution might be. The TSRB should also look carefully at what further improvements might be made in our fund, as the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe said.

One of the things that we considered was widows' pensions. We originally proposed two thirds, which is the proportion paid in many private sector schemes, to be paid to widows in future. But if we were to get anything it was to be five eighths or nothing, so we had to accept five eighths.

The TSRB should have looked at benefits in other funded schemes in the public sector. For example, teachers have favourable arrangements for early retirement and British Airways has a three-year salary payment rather than two for death in service.

I understand that the TSRB has been asked to look only at the level of contributions, but as the Government Actuary can look only at the state of the fund as at June 1990 and report this summer on what should be done, there will be time for the Government to consider the TSRB report on contributions. We could use clause 6 to carry that into effect. Surely it would be better if the TSRB were to take evidence from Members about desirable improvements, such as widows' pensions. It is, after all, nearly three years since the TSRB last reported and it will be aware of the defects in our scheme compared with other funded schemes. It will also be aware of the lack of balance in our contributions and the resources available to us.

Therefore, I propose that after the Government Actuary recommends what the contributions should be in order to provide existing and proposed benefits, the TSRB should come forward with further recommendations before the end of the year which the Government Actuary could then calculate and quantify. That would be in time for the Government to carry the proposals into effect under clause 6 before June 1992.

The House will know that under clause 6 the Leader of the House may, with the consent of the Treasury, by regulations, make provision for the benefits here. I do not understand why the Treasury——

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it the case that if the debate concludes at 7 o'clock, we do not have to come back at 10 o'clock, but that if it does not conclude at 7 o'clock, we may have to come back at 10 o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): What the hon. Gentleman does this evening is a matter for him.

Sir Peter Hordern: I am just coming to the end of my remarks and I hope that the House will be patient. I am, after all, a trustee of the fund. This is a bad deal and it is quite wrong that we should have only an hour and a half in which to debate it. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am going to have my say.

I do not understand why the Treasury should be mentioned specifically under clause 6. It is bound to take a view anyway. The Treasury is getting off lightly, through no merit of its own. It has nothing to do with the success of the fund. If the trustees had wanted to, we could have invested all the money in Government securities, and where would the Treasury have been then? It must distinguish between the pay-as-you-go schemes and the funded schemes. A period of silence and modesty on the part of the Treasury would be welcome. Its part in all this has been distinctly shabby. I am astonished that the Treasury has had the nerve in clause 6 to show its head above the parapet. If that had happened in the private sector, the Treasury would have been castigated as a bad employer.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on bringing the Bill to the House and I wish him every success.

6.56 pm

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful for the way in which the Bill has been received. Several of those who have spoken have great experience in these matters. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was a distinguished Minister and a key architect of the personal pension scheme. I have no doubt that he will mount a powerful case to the TSRB along the lines that he put to the House tonight.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for all that he does as chairman of the trustees. He does a tremendous amount of work on matters of detail, as well as on the kind of things he has been talking about this evening.

There is a general feeling that the Bill should now go ahead so that we can get on with it. It has been long delayed. As hon. Members have said, it is comparatively modest, but it is right that it should be enacted. Therefore, I hope that we can now reach a conclusion on the Bill.

Some issues that have been raised during the debate are more relevant to the regulations—particularly the point regarding Members of the European Parliament, to which we may have time to return later. It is not a simple point that can be dealt with quickly, but it is one that I am considering. However, there are real complexities which we may be able to discuss later.

I said a great deal in my opening remarks and I now recommend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that the debate can continue after 10 o'clock. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) that an hour and a half is a ridiculous amount of time to debate such an important matter. I ask for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we allow the Bill to go forward, can the debate on the motion continue after 10 o'clock? I do not wish to delay the House, but I do wish to talk on the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

[Mr. Peter Fry]

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Committee tomorrow.

MINISTERIAL AND OTHER PENSIONS AND SALARIES BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved.

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging on and payment out of the Consolidated Fund or the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required to be so charged or paid under that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums so charged or payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I take it that if the opposed private business should end early the motion will be debated immediately afterwards?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Gentleman may certainly take that to be the position. However, on present form, I am not sure how likely it is. If the situation should arise, I will bear the hon. Gentleman's interest in mind.

Southampton Rapid Transit Bill *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

That the Petitions against the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The motion is simple and straightforward. Its purpose is to revive the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill so that it may receive further and detailed consideration in this House. It is not the purpose of tonight's debate to rehearse the principles or the detailed substance of the Bill; the proper time for that is the Second Reading debate and later stages. I do not intend to take up the valuable time of the House in an attempt to discuss the merits of the Bill. I am sure that I should be ruled out of order were I to do so.

The only question raised by this revival motion is whether the Bill should have an opportunity to resume its passage through Parliament, whether its contents are sufficiently important to the city of Southampton to justify the parliamentary and public scrutiny of a Second Reading debate and, should the Bill be given a Second Reading, to justify Committee consideration of petitions on it. The Bill was given lengthy consideration in another place.

The city of Southampton faces a period of rapid growth, resulting in pressures on its transport infrastructure and in unprecedented economic development. The rapid transit project that the city council is promoting by way of this Bill has been judged, after extensive study and consultation, to be the best way of meeting the changing transport needs of Southampton in a period of scarce public resources. On two occasions this judgment has been confirmed by a two-to-one majority on the city council, all parties having been given the opportunity of a free vote.

The city council has had to bring a private Bill before Parliament simply because a rapid transit system of the type proposed counts, in parliamentary terms, as requiring authority for a private Bill, just as railway Bills do. I regard this procedure as thoroughly outmoded, and I welcome

Governmemt proposals to change it so that non-parliamentary means may be found to deal with such matters. In any case, we owe it to the city of Southampton to give the matter further consideration.

The scope of the Bill is very specific. It authorises its promoter—the city council—to build a 4·4 km rapid transit system round the city centre. It involves the construction of a largely elevated track or guideway, segregated from all other means of transport, on which would travel electrically powered vehicles running on rubber tyres. The Bill includes power to acquire land by compulsory purchase, within defined limits of deviation of the route; to franchise the system out; to form a company; and to dispose of the system.

Southampton's is not the only Bill proposing a rapid transit or light rail solution to local transport problems to have come before the House. Such ventures are appearing increasingly around the country as transport authorities look for fuel-efficient and cost-efficient ways of addressing modern travel needs and their economic and environmental implications.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Like the hon. Gentleman, I am an East Anglian Member, not a Southampton Member. He may be aware that the city of Cambridge probably has greater transport and traffic problems than Southampton and the rest of the south coast put together. A rapid transit system has been mooted for Cambridge. All sorts of solutions are being put forward. However, the authorities in Cambridgeshire are concerned that there should be complete unanimity of opinion about such a dramatic change. Is there unanimity in Southampton?

Mr. Garrett: I hope that I shall be able, in the Second Reading debate, to deal at length with that point. All that we want at the moment is the revival of the Bill so that it may receive a Second Reading. If there is to be a test of the strength of the opposition to it, no doubt that will take place at later stages. This motion is very specific.

The emergence of stringent environmental criteria for such schemes is a point which I believe is not lost on the Under-Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I fully agree that this is a procedural motion. However, this is the first chance the House has had to look into some of the imperfections of this system. It is only right that we should be allowed to broaden the debate. Unless the reasons are given, how can we decide whether the Bill should be revived? We cannot just have an empty debate. I suppose that we could simply go home in 30 seconds without discussing this terrible Bill at all.

Mr. Garrett: The hon. Gentleman flatters me. His remarks should have been addressed to the Chair. I did not say that this was a procedural motion; it was you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who said so—and quite rightly. If the hon. Gentleman wants to refer at great length to the merits of the Bill, it is up to him to try. I am sure that you, Sir, will give him guidance as to whether he is in order.

Hon. Members will know of such other projects as the Midland Metro and ones in Manchester, Avon, Sheffield and South Yorkshire. Many more are expected, and the Minister gave notice of these when, on 18 December 1990, he presented evidence to the inquiry of the Select Committee on Transport into light rail systems.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): As a member of the Select Committee, I can tell the House that we have not yet published our report. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the number of schemes likely to meet the present requirements is very small? Southampton, at first sight, does not seem to be one of them. Does the hon. Gentleman think that this procedure should go ahead? It is the money of many community charge payers in Southampton that will promote this Bill and, in so doing, push a scheme that is very unlikely to come to fruition.

Mr. Garrett: I look foward to reading the Select Committee's report so that I may compare its criteria with the characteristics of this proposed system. As to whether the legislation should be proceeded with, presumably the House will make its decision tonight.

In his evidence to the Select Committee, the Minister said that another half dozen schemes might be in operation before the end of the century. Successive Transport Ministers in the present Government have welcomed such schemes.

The route proposed in the Bill aims to link the major features of the city and to connect existing public transport facilities—the railway, ferries, the bus station, coach transport facilities and the majority of car parks.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garrett: Not for the moment.

Twelve stops are to be provided, including the Pirelli site, Ocean Village, about three quarters of a mile of Associated British Ports land in various stages of development, and the Woolworths site. The scheme that the Bill proposes is intended to ease existing and future traffic congestion in Southampton city centre at a time when the city is poised to shift from a port-based economy to become a major south coast regional centre.

The service will be safe, reliable, quiet, frequent and easily extendable, subject to further authorisation. Some of the content of the Bill is concerned with the provisions for future funding of the scheme. It is a marriage of public initiative and public funding, and the Bill makes specific provision for the system to be franchised out.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garrett: In a minute.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have some experience of dealing with private Bills. You, Sir, will recall that when I moved a motion of this sort last year, the Opposition, quite rightly, expected me to give way to enable hon. Members to ask questions on matters about which they were concerned. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should adopt such an attitude, because on that previous occasion the Opposition expected me——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That matter is not one for me to consider.

Mr. Garrett: You will have noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I gave way on almost every other sentence at the start of my brief speech, but now I want to make a little progress.

The scheme will not be owned by the city council. Southampton made it clear that if money cannot be raised from the private sector, the project will not proceed.

[Mr. Garrett]

However, the council believes that private funding is available, and that in the current financial climate it is the best way to ensure that the city centre gets the extra transport capacity that it needs.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Garrett: Where was I? The council believes that private funding is the best way of ensuring, in the present financial climate, that the city gets the extra transport capacity that it needs in the shortest possible time scale.

Mr. Ashby: As this is a revival motion, the House should consider what prospect the project has of being successful. I heard that no interest whatsoever has been expressed by private sources in funding the scheme. As the hon. Gentleman emphasised that private funding is the most necessary ingredient, can he say who is prepared to finance the project? All the information that we have suggests that no interest in funding has been expressed by the private sector.

Mr. Garrett: I will deal with that later. However, the city council has made it clear that if the money cannot be raised from the private sector, it will not proceed.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garrett: I am still attempting to answer the previous intervention.

At present, the city council has received support from a large number of major public companies, in terms of raising funds for the project's next stage.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman is trying to mislead the House in his attempt to persuade right hon. and hon. Members that the city council has given some form of guarantee that there will be no public sector funding. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) wants to intervene—although I suppose that he cannot intervene in an intervention——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the House to the undesirability of sedentary noise.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Member for Bradford, South may be able to make his points later, in a long speech of the kind that he usually makes.

When the city council gave evidence to the Committee on Unopposed Bills in the other place, it refused to agree to a guarantee being written into the Bill that no public funding—either from Southampton community charge payers or any other source—would be used. As a former resident of the city, I may add that the word of Southampton's Labour city council is worthless, in respect of not only this but any other matter.

Mr. Garrett: The scheme will not proceed unless it can be financed from the private sector. The city council is currently in discussions with a large number of companies, which have expressed interest in contributing their money to the next stage of the project.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to intervene, he may find my remarks helpful—but they may worry some of my hon. Friends who are against the Bill. As this is an enabling measure, is it not impossible to detect how interested investors may be in the project until a prospectus is available? That cannot be done until the Bill has progressed. Finance is at the heart of whether or not the enabling motion is passed.

Mr. Garrett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful contribution. He is quite right—and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will observe that I have tried to stay within the rules of order in referring only to the worth of the Bill.

The Bill was deposited in the other place in November 1988 and it received its Second Reading on 13 April 1989. By the time that the Bill was considered by an Opposed Bill Committee between 30 October and 13 November 1989, the number of outstanding petitions was reduced from 16 to five. The city council agreed to accommodate concerns raised by petitioners and the Committee.

The Committee looked at every aspect of the scheme in detail, and its members spent a day in Southampton looking at the route, as well as listening to seven full days of evidence. It considered a very full range of issues, including external and environmental impact, efficacy of easing traffic congestion, the effect on trees, parks and open spaces, details of proposed funding and the benefits and advantages of the chosen Briway system.

Only two small changes were made in Committee—one proposed by the Bill's promoters to safeguard parkland, and the other a small rerouting proposal by the Lords Committee.

Immediately afterwards, Parliament did not agree the carry-over of Bills in the Session beginning in November 1989—so all Bills needing revival were effectively killed. The Leader of the House proposed and right hon. and hon. Members agreed, after consideration, that the Bills could proceed, but would have to start afresh as new Bills. So Southampton's Bill is not unique in losing some months due to procedural disagreements.

On 8 May 1990, the Bill finally received its Third Reading, and had its First Reading in this House. On 14 May, it was passed by the Examiners.

Mr. Hill: No progress was made because Southampton city council could not agree. There has been a terrific amount of interplay, and the Conservative group, aided by the Liberal Democrats, is completely opposed to the Bill. The objections that I have expressed in the House come direct from the city council.

Mr. Garrett: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain the motivation for that opposition when he makes his own speech.

The Bill's Second Reading was blocked for the first time on 22 May by Conservative Members, but, subject to this revival, its merits can be properly considered during a Second Reading debate. The democratic argument for further consideration—leaving aside the merits of the proposal—are unanswerable, and the citizens of Southampton would be badly served if the project could not be more closely considered during later stages of the Bill's progress.

At every stage, the project has been the subject of exhaustive consultations with specialists and public opinion in Southampton. The MVA consultancy employed Dr. George Gaskell of the London School of Economics to conduct a public consultation exercise in the

summer and autumn of 1988, and the search for the most effective scheme involved an international competition with proposals from 17 companies and consortia drawn from every continent. I was very pleased that the Briway system, which is British, was chosen. Expert and local evidence was called in the House of Lords Committee.

The rapid transit scheme that the Bill proposes is a practical and imaginative attempt to address current and future public transport challenges in a changing city without burdening Southampton's community charge payers or national taxpayers. That is why, in two independent surveys into public opinion in Southampton, 76 per cent. of all householders and 75 per cent. of individuals in a street survey wanted it. That is why it received all-party support in the other place, with only one dissenting voice heard there on Second Reading. That is why Lord Montagu, chairman of English Heritage, introduced the Bill and spoke in its support. That is why the scheme is not opposed by Hampshire county council and the local chamber of commerce, and why the majority of all councillors on Southampton city council twice voted in favour of the scheme.

Mr. Hill: Hampshire county council takes a completely neutral view. It is neither for nor against the project. One could not hope for the county council to adopt a fairer attitude, given that it is the area's transportation expert.

Mr. Garrett: That is why Hampshire county council is not opposed to the scheme. That seems to me to be a mindless and irrelevant interruption.

That is why the Department of Transport is actively considering the practicalities of introducing the scheme. Most important, that is why no fewer than 20 industrial and commercial concerns—many of which are national household names—are prepared to support the rapid transport scheme commercially. In the face of that support, denying the Bill the chance to progress would not only be undemocratic but would be a disgracefully wasted opportunity for the people who live and work in and travel to and round Southampton city centre.

Having followed the Bill's progress through the parliamentary process, discussed the proposal with people backing it, seen the congestion that the scheme is designed to tackle in the city, and seen and ridden the prototype vehicle for the scheme on its test track in Cranleigh, I am convinced that the matter is of sufficient importance to proceed to a Second Reading debate in the House, and I look forward to the House's assent to this motion.

7.20 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): The kindest comment that I can make about the speech of the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) is to remind the House of those famous lines of Oliver Goldsmith:

"Every absurdity has a champion to defend it."

Mr. John Garrett: If that was a spontaneous reaction to my speech, why did the hon. Gentleman have to read it?

Sir David Price *rose*——

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Because the Southampton Tory party told him to.

Sir David Price: I think that the shadow transport spokesman should be a little quieter at the moment.

Mr. Janman: The shadow transport spokesman just made a comment from a sedentary position. Does my hon. Friend agree that he is one of the people who would be likely to use this new transport system, because he is unable to use his car?

Sir David Price: I should have to say that that would not apply, because I intend to try to prove to the House that this proposed transport system does not convey people from their homes to the shopping centre.

I argue that the fact that they passed this Bill in another place is absolutely no reason why we should. I remind the House that two years ago there was a Hampshire county council Bill to build a Lyndhurst bypass. It was successful in another place and received a Second Reading here, but in Committee hon. Members were very stern in their condemnation of the Bill. They went so far as to suggest —in very parliamentary language—that the promoters of the Bill had been wasting the House's time. Therefore, on this occasion we are entitled to consider the merits of the Bill, because obviously, if it has merits, we should proceed with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will bear in mind the fact that the most appropriate occasion to consider the merits of a Bill is when it is before the House on Second Reading. We are now discussing a procedural motion.

Sir David Price: With respect——

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend agree that what is relevant to whether the House continues to allow procedural motions such as this to proceed is consideration of what lies behind the Bill, such as the fact that, at the moment, there are between 50 and 70 schemes for light rail systems, most of which will never be approved by Government? Not only do Bills that have little or no hope of success waste the time of Parliament—surely that is valuable enough—but they also lead to an awful waste of public money.

Sir David Price: I do not disagree with my hon. Friend. Also, it is relevant to whether the House passes this motion to consider whether the purpose behind the Bill is to produce the form of light transport that the hon. Member for Norwich, South was talking about—the type of system that I know my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) supports, as I do. That is why I think that some reference to the scheme becomes necessary, if we are to decide whether to assent to this motion. I shall endeavour to show the House that the scheme does not do any of the things that the hon. Member for Norwich, South suggests.

Mr. Janman: May I refer back to some of the comments by the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett)? For some unknown reason, he has a connection with the city of Southampton, although I am not aware of it—but perhaps he will correct me about that later.

The hon. Member said that it was democratic to allow this motion to proceed. However, this is a revival motion for this Session of Parliament. Given that there is plenty of evidence from the city of Southampton that it is very much divided on the matter—there is plenty of evidence that the city does not want it—it would be undemocratic to assent

[Mr. Janman]

to this revival motion so that the Bill could proceed this Session until there was a proven and clearly drafted case for the need and desire for such a transit system.

Sir David Price: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I invite the House to consider this project for a would-be rapid transit system—that is the name of the Bill. That very name suggests that the new system will produce enhanced facilities to convey the good citizens of Southampton from one part of the city to another, perhaps to bring them from the suburbs to the shopping centre. However, the system does none of those things.

In documentation with the Bill, the system is referred to as a "people mover". That is a sick joke. It no more moves people in any meaningful or constructive sense than a rollercoaster at a holiday camp. In fact, this scheme is little more than a rather grand rollercoaster. The phrase "people mover" reminds me of old-fashioned Soviet newspeak—it might have been written by George Orwell.

The real problem facing the city of Southampton is the same as that facing many other large towns in this country —the future of their city centres and especially of city centre shopping facilities. In the past, many large stores were located in the centre of cities, which acted as a magnet, and people came from all around to shop there. That is no longer the case, for a number of reasons that we are all aware of.

It is perfectly proper for the city of Southampton to try to counter that, and I shall remind the House of the reasons for it: the movement of population out of inner cities into the surrounding countryside; and the enormous increase in motor car ownership. In the Southampton area, many families have two cars, and quite a number with teenage children have more.

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the ways in which the system could operate is in conjunction with park-and-ride facilities? Perhaps I am wrong, but I understand the only way that one could park and ride on this scheme would be if one drove into the centre of Southampton to get on to it.

Sir David Price: My hon. Friend is, as always, extremely well informed.

The third reason is the advent of out-of-town shopping centres. To the east of Southampton, developers are in the process of building a large shopping complex which will combine one of Sainsbury's Savacentres and a Marks and Spencer with large parking facilities. The city of Southampton must put its mind to competing with that sort of attraction. The proposals in the Bill, which are very narrowly defined, go nowhere near meeting those challenges. If anyone doubts that, he should read the note circulated by the promoters of the Bill to hon. Members before this debate; it states:

"the proposed system is not directly intended to improve transport from outlying areas into the city centre".

Therefore, the system does none of the things that a good modern system——

Mr. Michael Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that, during debates on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill, an objection was raised when any hon. Member connected with the Bill spoke to people in the Box at the end of the Chamber. You deprecated it when that was taking place, and you and one of the other Deputy Speakers said how important it was for hon. Members connected with the Bill not to leave the Chamber and go to chat to people in the Box. Will you ensure that that does not happen tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no recollection of instructing the House in the way that the hon. Gentleman has suggested, and persons beyond the Bar of the House are not recognised by the Chair.

Sir David Price: The Bill is entirely irrelevant to Southampton's genuine transport problems. It is of no value to the majority of our citizens.

Mr. Ashby: Hon. Members have mentioned "park and ride", and it has been pointed out that it is necessary to get into Southampton to use the system. I have heard that Southampton's beautiful parks will be used as parking places, which would surely be most——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot deal with such matters in this debate. The motion enables the House, if it chooses, to discuss the matter that the hon. Gentleman is now trying to discuss; but we are currently discussing a procedural matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not seek to raise points of order, or any other points, while I am on my feet. This is a procedural motion which will enable the House to decide whether it wishes to discuss the merits and content of the Bill, and I suggest that we keep to it. No points of order can arise.

Sir David Price: As I have said, the Bill deals with none of Southampton's transport problems, and I therefore think that it would be a waste of the House's time to proceed further with it. Let me refer any hon. Member who considers that an irrelevant consideration at this stage to the story of the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill 1988. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the only possible advantage of the proposed system—it is not even a circular system surrounding the shopping centre; it is a distorted U-bend—is the provision of a "mickey mouse railway" for the kids. I am, of course, entirely sympathetic to the case that could be made for experimentation with some novel form of transport that could bring the majority of Southampton's citizens closer to the city centre, and bring people in from outside.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As my hon. Friend knows, we are debating whether we should take parliamentary time to consider this Bill. Is he aware of the proposal for a light rail transit system linking Fareham with Gosport, and with an underwater, under-harbour link with Portsmouth, which may proceed in due course if parliamentary time is available? The matter is currently being studied, but giving parliamentary time to the Southampton Bill might prevent proper consideration of a much more sensible scheme.

Sir David Price: That will interest many hon. Members. Most of us who are here tonight are probably sympathetic to new transport systems, and to the idea that they should be integrated with parking. My real objection to the Bill is that it achieves none of the objectives that we consider desirable, and is taking up parliamentary time for the sake of a scheme that will not secure a common public aim with

which many of us sympathise. That is why some of us have called it a mickey mouse scheme. Moreover, it has no tourist advantages—it is only a little U-bend around the middle of Southampton—and is environmentally damaging. One of the glories of Southampton is its old walls, which the scheme would jeopardise.

Hon. Members should consider how far the terms of the Bill correspond with the system that they think will result. We have not been told the names of any of the supposed great private sponsors, but without the money the whole project will collapse, as the hon. Member for Norwich, South conceded. On that ground alone, the Bill is a waste of parliamentary time.

Mr. Hill: There was great excitement in Southampton city council about a year ago, when Mr. Peter de Savary bought Eastleigh airfield. The press office rushed into print the story that Mr. de Savary might be prepared to link Eastleigh airport with the city centre. That, too, was pie in the sky—and we have been eating a lot of that pie.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the motion.

Sir David Price: Let me return to the question of where the money will come from. Given the time that has elapsed since the Bill's Second Reading in another place, I should have thought that by now it would be clear——

Mr. Michael Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not dream of challenging your ruling, but may I draw your attention to the guidance that was issued when we last debated a revival motion—on a Bill that affected my constituency? The Chair ruled that, as the Bill had not been presented to the House for Second Reading, it was in order for "reasonable latitude" to be granted for the background to be explained, and that the Chair could therefore allow

"more than the customary flexibility."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 183, c. 672.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I very much hope that, when the hon. Gentleman said that he would not dream of challenging my ruling, he meant what he said.

I think that the House will agree that so far, I have allowed the "reasonable latitude" advocated by the occupant of the Chair on that earlier occasion. It is for the Chair to judge how much latitude should be provided and how reasonable it should be, and I think that so far I have been quite reasonable.

Sir David Price: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I think that it is relevant to the motion to ask the promoters for more information about where the money will come from. The hon. Member for Norwich, South made it clear that it would come from the private sector, but I know of no single corporate investor who is proposing to put money into the project. As for the individual Southampton citizen, as far as I am aware no great queue of would-be investors has formed outside the civic offices, as happened in London at the time of the electricity privatisation. I am reminded of the notice in the window of a famous Dublin undertaker, which read: "Funerals arranged—self-drive service".

I hope that I have said enough to make it clear that the Bill makes no constructive contribution to the real problems relating to Southampton's city centre and its local businesses. It is about as helpful as throwing a drowning man both ends of a rope. I do not think that we should waste the House's time any further, and I very much hope that the motion will not be passed tonight.

7.37 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): As the House must be well aware by now, we are debating a revival motion, not a motion for Second Reading. So far, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have shown considerable understanding when hon. Members have strayed a footstep or two into the detail of the Bill. The detail must be considered to some extent, because, if the revival motion is not carried this evening, the Bill will be killed off completely. Our views on both the principle and the detail are therefore relevant to what is essentially a procedural motion.

Let me declare an interest—not a pecuniary interest. My constituency, like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), comprises part of the suburbs of Southampton: mine covers the western half of the blue horseshoe that surrounds the city, while his covers the eastern half. My constituents and I are frequent travellers in and out of Southampton, as I have been all my life. Some people go there to work, some to shop and some to visit Southampton's two theatres—and very good they are, too—or its museums and art galleries. Southampton has a great deal to offer, although my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) would be the first to admit that it is probably not the tourist mecca that some others cities represent.

Mr. Hill: We are trying to make progress with the sporting facilities at Lordshill. I understand that my hon. Friend opposes the scheme, for many reasons. We are short of an ice rink and all other sporting facilities——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straining my reasonable latitude.

Mr. Hill: The point that I am trying to make to my hon. Friend is that it is not much good having a people mover if there is opposition to sporting facilities in the city.

Mr. Colvin: I am not sure whether you would like me to respond to that intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Viggers: Southampton needs an ice rink, but Gosport has one. It will be on the route of the Gosport to Fareham light rail transit if and when——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get back, please, to the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Colvin: On the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Test, I have taken my lead from democratically elected local representatives—the parish council of Nursling and Rownhams, which would be seriously affected by the planning application to which my hon. Friend referred. We must pay attention to the views of democratically elected local representatives on ice rinks, tennis courts, and the people mover.

Southampton is, par excellence, a transport city and experiments of this nature could appropriately be carried out there. It is Britain's premier gateway to Europe. Moreover, 60,000 people travel into and out of Southampton every day. That represents 120,000 movements into and out of the city each day. That could rise to 200,000 movements when the proposed city centre

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development goes ahead. I am told that it would be funded completely by private enterprise money and would cost £1 billion. Transport pressures in the city will then increase.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh referred to out-of-town shopping. That raises another interesting point. My constituency suffers from many pressures. There is much pressure to build out-of-town shopping precincts in the vicinity of Romsey, but my constituents hotly resist such development. They would prefer to travel by some means of mass transport system to Southampton, thereby bringing prosperity and jobs to the city, instead of having to tolerate unnecessary development in their own backyard.

Mr. Janman: If I heard my hon. Friend correctly, the implication is that someone who lives in one of the outer suburbs of Southampton, such as Lordshill, would be able to get on to the rapid transport system and go to the centre of the city. If, however, he looks at the proposals as outlined on the map, he will see that the rapid transport system does not go anywhere near any of the outer parts of the city. It goes round the periphery of the city centre.

Mr. Colvin: If my hon. Friend would contain himself —that is the first and last time that I shall give way to him —he would hear that most of us who live in and around Southampton are subjected to considerable traffic congestion. The city of Southampton is not well endowed with car parks. There are about 15,800 car parking spaces in the city. One of the advantages of the proposed people mover is that additional car parking places for my constituents who want to go into Southampton could be provided on less valuable ground, thereby releasing the ground at present used for car parking for more intensive development.

I should like to be able to park my car in a convenient car park and then get on to the people mover to go around Southampton. I do not enjoy walking round the city on a wet day. As Southampton is in the south of England, hon. Members with constituencies elsewhere might presume that it is a lovely, dry and sunny place throughout the year. It is not. According to the Meteorological Office, in the past 10 years, Southampton had on average 119 wet days out of 365. When one walks from the car into Southampton city centre to shop or to go to work, one needs an umbrella or a raincoat one day in three. It would be much more comfortable if one could get on to a people mover.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): How will the proposal help to reduce the congestion between my hon. Friend's constituency and Southampton?

Mr. Colvin: I shall come to that point in a minute. There is congestion on the roads when one drives in and out of Southampton, but we are dealing in this motion with traffic congestion in Southampton because it does not have a people mover. Southampton would be an excellent place for a rapid transit system—or what has been referred to in the debate as a people mover. They are becoming popular elsewhere in the world. I have a list of the cities that enjoy such a facility.

Sir David Price: If my hon. Friend wants to improve public transport from his constituency to Southampton, he should work with British Rail and the county council so that the system is sited over the existing railway line. He might then achieve his aim. This, however, is just a mickey mouse scheme in the middle of Southampton.

Mr. Colvin: I take my hon. Friend's point. That would require another private Bill. I wish that these matters could be proceeded with by means other than private Bills and the need for procedural motions.

Mr. Viggers: This is the third time that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) has referred to the proposal as a mickey mouse scheme. I submit that that is unfair to mickey mouse. Disneyland has just such a system. It works extremely well because it is designed exactly to meet the needs and shape of Disneyland, whereas this scheme is not designed to meet the needs and shape of Southampton city centre.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps we could return to the motion before the House and get away from Disneyland.

Mr. Colvin: I trust that in cities such as Jacksonville, Miami, Bordeaux, Sydney, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Orly, Taipeh and Chicago private Bills were not required for either the municipality or free enterprise to construct the people mover systems that those cities now enjoy. A people mover was constructed in Lille in 1983. Admittedly, it was a small, mickey mouse system to begin with, but it was so popular that it was extended three times and has now carried over 130 million passengers in total.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Perhaps in Lille and the other cities that the hon. Gentleman mentioned they did not have mickey mouse politicians similar to the right-wing bunch of school boys sitting alongside him while he makes a serious attempt properly to debate the motion.

Mr. Colvin: After that helpful intervention I shall continue.

Mr. Hill: I have been going to Strasbourg for a considerable time and I have never noticed a railway on concrete lines going through the city. The only little railway there is for tourists. It is shaped like a Noddy train and pulls about four coaches. Is that the railway to which my hon. Friend is referring?

Mr. Colvin: I have not had the advantage of going to Strasbourg to see the railway, but I will go now and have a look at it. I have not been to the cities that I mentioned, but perhaps my hon. Friend has.

There are three options facing Southampton. First, it can do nothing about its traffic congestion. Secondly, it could, given a fair wind, as it is trying to do, secure the passing of the revival motion so that it can introduce a light rail system at ground level, which would conflict with existing traffic and cause even greater problems. Thirdly, it could have a so-called people mover such as that recommended in the Bill. It would be electronically powered and automatic with unmanned vehicles. It would probably run on rubber wheels and it would be on a segregated guideway, which would mean that there would be no waiting. It would probably have great passenger appeal. I would certainly use it. It would not conflict with any of the existing roadways and would not add to congestion or exacerbate existing traffic problems. It would have to be either under ground or above ground. The proposed system is above ground level. That view was

shared by Her Majesty's Government, when, in April 1989 —the House has been at this for a long time—Lord Brabazon of Tara said:

"This is one of a number of private Bills providing for new light transport systems in our major cities. Potentially these systems have many advantages: for example, where segregated from other vehicles, they achieve faster speeds than buses; they also have the flexibility to cope with gradients and curves beyond the capacity of conventional railways."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 April 1989; Vol. 506, c. 463.]

He also said that the Government had no objection to the Bill and that he hoped that the other place would give it a Second Reading, which it did.

If a magic wand could be waved, I should like to see a people mover operating in Southampton. I would certainly use it. Surely it is up to Southampton and its elected representatives to decide. It is not for us to dictate to Southampton on such a matter.

Mr. Ashby: What weight would my hon. Friend give to the elected Members of Parliament from Southampton, both of whom are against the scheme? Should weight be given to the Conservatives on the council who, as I understand it, are equally opposed to the scheme? Should weight be given to some 86 per cent. of the population of Southampton who took part in a wide survey of 3,000 to 4,000 people?

Mr. Colvin: That is a weighty question. I hesitate to draw a comparison between hon. Members elected to this House and councillors elected to the city council when it comes to weighing up the relative power of their opinion and the value of their judgment. We are debating this matter in this House and, therefore, we must give priority to the opinions of the elected representatives from Southampton in the Chamber—my hon. Friends the Members for Test and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). My hon. Friend the Member for Itchen is a Minister, so will be unable to speak, but I believe that he shares the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Test.

Sir David Price: On his interesting democratic point, does my hon. Friend accept that when a Bill is before the House, the views of local Members of Parliament are of overriding importance? If a motion is before the local city council, it is quite different.

Mr. Colvin: As one would expect, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh has put far more eloquently the point that I was trying to make. Members of Parliament are sent to this place to use their judgment and that is precisely what we shall be doing after having heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Test because it is his judgment to which we shall listen most carefully. The importance of listening to elected representatives from Southampton is that they will have to live with the people mover if it is constructed and they represent those who may have to pay for it if it is not viable. So, the principal question that we must consider is whether the people mover will be viable and, if not, in discussing this procedural motion, are we saying that the people of Southampton will have to pay for it instead?

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh hinted that he was in favour of the principle but not necessarily in favour of this scheme. I accept that and I shall now deal with some of the interventions by my hon. Friends. I have distinct reservations. The failure of the scheme to connect directly with the suburbs is of paramount importance because it means that my constituents in Romsey could not get straight on to it to come into Southampton, but would have to clog up the roads to get there. There are problems in the Waterside part of my constituency where the A326 is a well-known death trap. It is congested at Totton going into Southampton over what is known as the red bridge. If the people mover connected directly with the Waterside part of my constituency either by a bridge or a tunnel under Southampton water, I should be the first to vote for the revival motion. As some of my hon. Friends have said, it is no use producing a mickey mouse system that just goes round the centre of the city. It has to connect with the infrastructure.

Sir Anthony Grant: I have been listening to the debate with keen interest because we talk about such matters in Cambridgeshire, which has similar problems that may come before the House. I have listened to my hon. Friends' criticisms of the Bill and for the past hour we have been listening to criticisms from hon. Members who know a great deal more about this than I do. We are being asked to provide for the revival of the Bill so that it can have a Second Reading. In view of all the Bill's obvious defects and the opposition to it, would it not be more sensible to refuse to allow the Bill to be revived so that the promoters and everybody else can take on board all the points that have been made, together with the criticisms of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and the criticisms about the mickey mouse nature of the scheme, and come back, if necessary, with a much more sensible scheme? Therefore, is it not logical for the House to refuse to allow the Bill to be revived?

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend has really made his speech. His is a sensible proposal and I am sure that hon. Members will take it on board.

My other criticism of the system as proposed in the Bill is the failure to complete the so-called loop. Originally it was a loop and that seemed to make sense, but now it is a horseshoe because one section has been removed. I am told that the loop could be completed later.

Mr. Hill: The circle was cut because Liberal Democrats would not support socialist councillors in impinging on the park land that was necessary to complete the central loop.

Mr. Colvin: I understand that, but I do not want to debate the detail of the route too much as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have to call me to order.

Many points have been made about funding. Of all my reservations, the one about funding is the most important. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh asked where the money is coming from. Southampton city council issued a press statement on 2 February 1989, in which it said:

"The Council has resolved that all the money needed to build and operate the people mover must come from the private sector, whose benefit would exceed its contribution. The people mover is forecast to generate operating profit as a business in its own right."

That sounded very good two years ago, but in a statement which hon. Members will have received in advance of the debate, the promoters say:

"Although the City Council have initiated the scheme for rapid transit, it is intended that the system should be financed almost entirely by contributions from developers and from other sources in the private sector."

The council is not quite so bullish as it was two years ago, which begins to sow seeds of doubt in my mind about financial viability. In its circular to hon. Members, it

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anticipated the question whether developers in Southampton would provide some of the funds. It answered that simply by saying:

"Developers have publicly expressed support for the scheme, and indicated a willingness to make a financial contribution; consultants' calculations suggest that there are substantial, real commercial benefits to be gained from the People Mover; firm commitments from developers can only be obtained at a later stage."

There is the rub. By "later stage", they mean that, when developers have a prospectus before them from which they can judge the detailed merits of the people mover and its financial viability, they can make a judgment. I have a list showing 20 of the so-called financial supporters—big businesses in Southampton—which would be prepared, we are told, to put up money: Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, Ocean Village Ltd., Associated British Ports, a major land owner in the dock area of the city, Southern Electric, Imry Holdings Ltd, the Pentagon—I am not sure what that is, but I am sure that it is not the one about which we hear so much in the news—Drawlane Transport Group, Southampton Citybus and British Rail, all of which are big transport operators, Tarmac Construction, Mowlem, Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd., Bovis, P. Trant Ltd., Southampton city council, Briway Transit Systems, Brown and Root Vickers Ltd., and Von Roll Transport System Ltd. They will not know whether to invest until they see a prospectus, which they will not see unless the Bill completes its passage through Parliament.

We should consider whether a revival motion could be influenced by our opinion of Southampton city council's preferred mass transit system. It has selected the Briway Transit system following international competition against the major suppliers of transit systems. It selected Briway because, first, it employs modern and proven technology; secondly, it fulfilled the tender specification in every respect; thirdly, its performance was greatly superior to other transit systems in terms of quietness, speed, gradient climbing and ability to negotiate six-metre radius turns smoothly and comfortably; fourthly, it was competitive in price, and viable to operate with low fares, which is very important; fifthly, it was environmentally friendly and energy efficient; sixthly, it would be built with the minimum of disturbance and noise; and, finally, it was demonstrated to be a system capable of great flexibility in its applications and one which could be easily extended to serve suburban communities. As a Member of Parliament who represents one of the suburbs of Southampton, I particularly like that latter reason. The council might have added that it is British—another good reason for selecting Briway. That has all given Briway the stamp of approval, which is helping it to win valuable export orders in Australia, Malaysia, Korea and Taiwan. It is something for a British company to beat the Koreans and Taiwanese at their own game.

Briway is being evaluated by three major airports in the United Kingdom as well as in Leeds, Bristol, Cardiff, Stoke-on-Trent and Kent. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) and my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) and for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), as Transport Ministers, have been greatly impressed by demonstrations of the Briway system at the designer's test track.

If that stamp of approval for Briway were not enough, I can report that Birmingham Centro, the corporate name of the West Midlands passenger transport executive, has just heard from the Department of Transport that it has singled out Briway as the benchmark against which other systems are being evaluated for the Midland metro. That is a tribute to Mr. Alan Bristow, the owner of Briway, and to his designers and engineers, who have a world-beater in an increasingly competitive market.

Mr. Hill: I should like to make it perfectly clear that at no time has anyone said that the system is not capable of doing the job. We have said that the elevated track, close to the medieval walls of the city, is environmentally gruesome. I am going to see the chairman of Briway in about two weeks' time to reassure him that his train was not criticised and that if there is a sensible transport scheme for the city of Southampton his company could be one of the forerunners.

Mr. Colvin: I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend say that; it may influence the way in which I vote. I am delighted to know that he is going to see the Briway system. I have seen it, as have many other city councillors who are interested in the project.

It is probably true that if a canvass survey were carried out to which people responded realistically, more people would be in favour of a mass transit system in the middle of Southampton than against it. That would also be true if one took in people from outside the city of Southampton, who would be able, like me, to enjoy the system without the risk of having to carry the can of paying for it in due course were it not a financial success.

I have concluded that Southampton city council has produced, in essence, a good scheme, although there is no doubt that it is capable of improvement. The council has selected, as my hon. Friend the Member for Test said, the right system in choosing Briway as the mass transit system. Whether in today's economic climate the system should proceed is debatable. The revival motion provides for that.

I shall listen carefully to what hon. Members have to say and especially to what my hon. Friend the Member for Test says. He is the hon. Member who is most closely affected, so I shall listen to him before I decide how to vote.

8.10 pm

The Minister for Shipping and Public Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It may be helpful if I intervene briefly to explain the Government's position. Clearly, there has been great interest in the Bill among Conservative Members. The system is undoubtedly controversial within the Southampton area, but it is not for me to comment. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) feels strongly. My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic is following the issue very closely but, obviously, he cannot take part in the debate.

I reiterate that the Government's position is strictly neutral. We are grateful to the Chairman of Ways and Means for tabling the motion so that the House can reach a decision. However, it is for the House to decide; it is not for the Government to have a view or to take a line, and the Government will follow their usual practice in these matters.

8.11 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The debate has been interesting so far, if only because of the presence of some Conservative Members who have been attracted to it. I understand that there are opposing views about the proposal in Southampton and elsewhere in that part of the world. The procedural motion will enable those views to be heard and it will also enable the petitioners against the Bill to put their case before the House. A few minutes ago, there was discussion about the proper role of Members of Parliament in private Bill procedure. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) agrees, at least for the moment. A number of hon. Members with no pecuniary or constituency interest in the scheme will hear the views of the petitioners and recommend accordingly. Although there are many unsatisfactory aspects to the private Bill procedure, private Bill Committees have worked well over the years. Most petitioners have pronounced themselves reasonably happy with the conduct of the Committees and with the way in which their objections have been heard and, on some occasions, resolved. It would seem from what we have heard so far—especially from some Conservative Members—that there is no pleasing some hon. Members. I will not comment yet on the position of the hon. Member for Test whose speech we eagerly await.

When I saw some of the characters who had been attracted to the debate, I knew that we were in for an eventful, if not an informative, evening. I was interested in the views of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). I know that he participates eagerly in these debates. He expressed the view strongly that it was not for my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who introduced the Bill with his customary ability, to take instructions from third parties. My hon. Friend consulted a third party whom we do not recognise in this Chamber, after he had made his speech. I only wish that some Conservative Members had done the same in the course of similar legislation.

Mr. Michael Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: I will give way in a moment. I have not finished with the hon. Gentleman yet; in fact I have barely started. I will give way at the appropriate time.

I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes felt that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South was taking instructions from someone else. The Bill has, after all, been supported by democratically elected members of Southampton city council. I seem to remember that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes gave slavish devotion to the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill which was opposed by democratically elected councillors and which was supported only by the paid directors of a trust port. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect that Opposition Members at least are more impressed by the views of democratically elected councillors of whichever party than by the views of paid directors of a particular trust port. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue that aspect of his previous argument. In my view and in that of the Labour party, it is perfectly reasonable and honourable for the sponsors of private Bills such as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South to conduct themselves in that way.

Mr. Michael Brown: When the democratically elected councillors of Glanford, of Cleethorpes and of Humberside voted in favour of the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill, why did the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends not accept the democratic view?

I raised the point about the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) consulting persons outside the Chamber because, when I was in the hon. Gentleman's position, many Opposition Members made great play of the fact that I was doing what the hon. Gentleman has done. I am merely trying to suggest that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) should bear in mind all the actions that he and his hon. Friends took when I was in the position of the hon. Member for Norwich, South.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I hope that, in responding, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) will remember that we are dealing with the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill and with its revival motion.

Mr. Snape: Those matters will be uppermost in my mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was talking about the promoters of the Bill. In this case, the promoter is the democratically elected local authority. In the case of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, the promoters were the paid directors of the trust port to whom the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes gave slavish support in the course of the legislation.

Mr. John Garrett: In response to the hyperthyroid intervention from the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), let me say that my hon. Friend may be interested to know that I spoke to people—who do not exist in the eyes of the House—after my speech simply to point out that the opposition to the Bill was lengthy and eccentric, so they might be here for some hours yet.

Mr. Snape: I do not want my hon. Friend to think that I am being rude. I should have thought that that conclusion might have been drawn by the people who do not exist when they saw some of the hon. Members who had been attracted to the debate.

The basic objections to the Bill appear to be politically based. As the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has pointed out, Southampton, like many similar towns——

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: Let me continue and then I will think about it. The hon. Gentleman has intervened six times, but he has not shed much light on our proceedings despite the thousands of words that he has expended during those interventions. I might give way to the hon. Gentleman in the next few minutes if he is nice to me, but at the moment I am dealing with the eloquent speech made by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside, who pointed out that, like other similar towns and cities throughout the country, Southampton has a severe traffic problem—*[Interruption.]* I should have thought that even the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes—non-stop sedentary chatterbox that he is—would appreciate that the citizens of Southampton are concerned about traffic congestion, and

[Mr. Snape]

that that is why their elected representatives have proposed a scheme which they hope will help to alleviate some of that congestion.

Sir David Price: It will not.

Mr. Snape: Again from a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman points out that it will not. It would be difficult, under our archaic procedures, for local authorities to propose a scheme overnight involving the digging up or laying of tracks in every single suburb in every city centre in the country. One has to start somewhere. I shall not linger for too long on the details of the Bill, but I understand that it would facilitate the start of a scheme which the city council hopes will eventually contribute substantially to the alleviation of traffic congestion in the city. It appears to me that that is a worthy objective, and it ought to be given due consideration under the procedures of the House.

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Colvin *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I shall come to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) shortly. I have been referring to the speech made by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and I now give way to him.

Mr. Colvin: It is clear that if a people mover were constructed in Southampton, it would have a considerable environmental impact on the city. In such cases, it is open to city councils to apply to the Department of Transport for a section 56 grant. On this occasion, the Minister was up and down like a Jack-in-the-box; there was no time to intervene in his speech. Perhaps, therefore, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) would like to ask the Minister—in the hope that we shall get an answer—whether Southampton has applied for a grant or intends to do so and whether it would qualify for such help from taxpayers' money as well as community charge payers' money.

Mr. Snape: Two matters directly arise from the hon. Gentleman's intervention. First, I could not put such a question as eloquently as him. Secondly, knowing the Minister as I do, I very much doubt whether we would get a straight answer to that question. I fear that if we got a straight answer, and if it were anything other than no, the Minister might be an ex-Minister first thing tomorrow morning. No hon. Member on either side of the House would want that even if Labour wants them all out come the next general election.

Mr. McLoughlin: Let me clarify the matter. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) did not have time to intervene in my speech. I usually try to keep my remarks short on these occasions, as I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak.

I understand that Southampton city council had originally hoped to finance the project entirely through contributions from developers and others but that it has now concluded that there will be a need for a public sector contribution, including a section 56 grant. However, no application for a section 56 grant has yet been made, or received.

Mr. Colvin: Taxpayers' money.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside refers to taxpayers' money in the sort of tone that Mary Whitehouse might use when referring to certain television programmes. It seems that our fleeting moment of agreement is at an end. Whether in Southampton or in any other city, it would be fairly difficult to finance a people mover or any sort of public transport scheme without any public money. It would be fairly difficult to find a city anywhere in the world where some public money had not been spent on transport. It is entirely to the credit of Southampton city council that, in embarking on the project, it has tried to attract private finance. Should the motion be approved, we shall be able to hear in detail what the council has done, what it expects to do and how much interest has been generated. If, on the other hand, the motion is defeated because of the ideological objections of the far right of the Conservative party, we shall never have the opportunity to hear about that, even though a considerable amount of public money will have been spent on taking the Bill through the other place and preparing it for its passage through this House.

Mr. Janman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not thinking of me when he referred to the far right. Let me come to the aid of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). It was a little unfair of the hon. Gentleman to chastise my hon. Friend and to say that he was inconsistent. The recent exchange between the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) concerning the possibility of taxpayers' money being put into the system supports my argument. One cannot compare support for a trust port scheme with support for a local authority scheme. The trust port scheme that my hon. Friend supported was not going to make any demands on the public purse.

In this case, however, we have a city council—albeit democratically-elected—which wants to do something which will make demands on the public purse in such a way as to involve central Government finance. Perhaps, therefore, it would be right to take note not just of what the democratically-elected council says but of what the two local democratically-elected parliamentarians say, which is that we are talking about public finance, including taxpayers' money. That is an important point. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes is absolutely right and is being entirely consistent.

Mr. Snape: I was reluctant to give way to the hon. Gentleman, and no doubt you can see why, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was interminably long and predictably inaccurate. The Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill will involve public money because the busier the port becomes—*[Interruption]*. The Minister ought to listen to this because he is looking bewildered. The busier the port becomes, the more the public sector will be called upon to improve road links to the port because it will be said that heavy traffic is passing too close to people's homes. With the Department as it is, that is presumably exactly what will happen. The Minister can usually find money for road developments but not for public transport.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will note that a substantial amount of public money has been going into various light rail schemes which have met the

criteria for section 56 grants. Those schemes include a large development under way in Manchester. My hon. Friends gave permission for the Sheffield scheme to go forward and we are currently evaluating the Centro scheme.

Mr. Snape: Strictly speaking, the Centro scheme has nothing to do with the motion before us, but I have a deep personal interest in it because it passes through my constituency. I noted from the Minister's comments a week or so ago that he has managed to find money for a roads package around Birmingham, even though he is still evaluating the public transport advantages that will be provided by the Midland metro.

Let me return to the motion. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Test is no longer in his place. I said earlier that I intended to refer to him. I understand his basic objection to the proposal, which is a political objection. In his view, the fact that Labour-controlled Southampton city council has made the proposal is good enough reason to oppose it. Nothing that the hon. Gentleman has said so far will lead me to any other conclusion, although there are other reasons that we might consider. It is apparent, for example, that the hon. Gentleman is not the sort of man who would ride round the city centre on the people mover. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman prefers a good brisk walk on his way to the gymnasium or the squash court. All credit to him for that; it shows in his remarkable physical appearance. But the other citizens of Southampton may not be quite as fit and athletic as the hon. Gentleman, and they may want a people mover. The fact is that we do not know, and tonight is not the occasion on which to find out. Given the amount of public money involved, it would seem eminently sensible——

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: I shall certainly not give way to the hon. Gentleman again as I do not have another 15 minutes to spare. His hon. Friend the Member for Test ought to be here if he has a point to make. Although the two hon. Gentleman are very similar physically and spend a lot of time playing squash or whatever they do together, we had better wait for the hon. Member for Test to make the point.

Mr. Janman *rose——*

Mr. Snape: If the hon. Gentleman guarantees that his intervention will be a normal sentence long——

Mr. John Garrett: And sensible.

Mr. Snape: Well, I cannot accept that it will be very sensible—in fact, I know that it will not be—but if he promises that it will be short, I will give way.

Mr. Janman: It will be short and not sensible. The hon. Gentleman is implying that my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) is not very fit and that therefore he will not be able to gain access to this system because it is elevated and he will not be able to climb the many flights of stairs that he would have to climb to get into the carriages.

Mr. Snape: For once there is a grain of truth in something the hon. Gentleman says. It seems to me that the scheme has even greater merit now because in no time at all the hon. Member for Test will be even fitter than his hon. Friend. That is another argument in favour of the scheme. For all of us who have listened to the hon. Member for Test over the years, the idea of being guaranteed his presence and common sense for many more years is appealing.

The hon. Member for Thurrock and some of his hon. Friends make great play with their concern about public money. I remind them that preparing such legislation is not cheap. Our learned friends do not work for a guinea a word any more. I understand that the price has gone up considerably. I understand, further, that the costs that the poll tax payers of Southampton have inevitably incurred, as would happen in the case of any other legislation to do with public transport, already amount to around three quarters of a million pounds.

This means that the debates about the merits of this scheme and the objections to it ought to be fully heard. That investment, which has been made to bring improved public transport to the crowded and congested city of Southampton, should receive a fair hearing in this place through the procedures that I outlined earlier. I hope, therefore, that the House will give this proposal the go-ahead this evening and that we can see in detail what is proposed and what are the objections. To defeat the Bill at this stage would not only indicate the right-wing bias and ideology of certain Tory Members present this evening; it would also be extremely expensive for the poll tax payers of Southampton—a fact of which I and my hon. Friends will remind them in the time up to and including the next general election.

8.34 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): The Chair has already said that in discussions of this kind it allows a certain latitude with regard to what might otherwise be an extremely narrow point. I rise purely to be of assistance to the Chair in that I do not want to talk about the merits of the Bill at all; I want to talk about the motion. I do so for a very serious reason. It is not only that I happen to represent a south coast constituency where we are interested in moving people conveniently and quickly and therefore interested in the ways other people may find to deal with this problem; it is that some years ago I was a member of the Committee which considered the Ginns and Guttridge (Crematorium) Bill. I am sure that all hon. Members in this crowded House are fully aware of the details of that Bill and I will not rehearse them this evening. But I remind the House that that was the longest private Bill Committee this century. Not only did it have to have revival motions but it ran over from one Parliament to the next. A general election intervened and the Bill had to be brought back again.

The point is that in the end, when the Bill came back from the Committee, on which we had worked literally for years, it was defeated in the House. The Bill—for the sake of hon. Members who were not then in the House, although I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember it—concerned a proposal for the building of a crematorium in the city of Leicester. The discussion was about whether it was a suitable site, whether the technology was correct, whether the traffic arrangements were right, and so on.

It was a tragedy that the system of working through a private Bill and the procedures of the House on that occasion provided absolutely no protection to a moderately sized company which needed to promote a Bill

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of this nature. Although a carry-over motion contains within its terms a provision that there shall not be renewed fees because the Bill is being renewed, that does not mean that the costs to the promoters cease. The costs of legal advice and of counsel continue.

It was said earlier this evening that the members of the legal profession were probably not unduly concerned that our debate might take three hours as opposed to one. I am quite sure that there was no great objection to the fact that the Bill to which I referred took three years.

Mr. Janman: I just want to give my hon. Friend some information that supports his point. I quote from an article in the *Sunday Evening Echo* written by the local government correspondent, Kate Thompson, which says:

"A secret memo written by project manager Steve Keys"—

who I think is somebody connected with the company that has been set up to further the cause of this project—

"reveals that a further £176,000 will have to be pumped into the project if more parliamentary time is won tonight."

So if one shares the concern of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) about waste of community charge payers' money, it would be a very good thing not to allow the motion to go through tonight.

Mr. Griffiths: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, because that is the danger. If the Bill is likely to succeed, there is every reason for us to give it a fair wind, particularly if we have no direct, immediate interest in its provisions. If there is a scheme for the improvement of transport in the great city of Southampton, the citizens of the even greater city of Portsmouth will wish it well, but all the evidence is that this is a highly controversial proposal and I am sure that hon. Gentlemen, including the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who spoke to the motion, would agree that there is no evidence of broad unanimity in the city of Southampton. All that we have to do is convince the House that what the people of Southampton want is right.

Mr. John Garrett: It has the support of the majority of councillors. Has the hon. Gentleman ever heard that?

Mr. Griffiths: I will rephrase what I said. I am trying very hard not to be politically controversial. I want to talk about the practicalities. It is true that the majority of Southampton city council has given approval to this scheme, but it is perfectly reasonable to say that something of this nature should not be based on a single political party. Three major political parties are represented on Southampton city council and I should have thought that something based on one party would fall within the definition of being politically controversial.

Mr. Snape: It is a very interesting constitutional theory that it is unfair to put legislation through if it is supported by only one party. That is not really a doctrine, I should have thought, for which the previous Prime Minister would have had any time. However, I will turn to the more realistic parts of the hon. Gentleman's speech. None of us knows whether the Bill deserves the wide support which the hon. Gentleman is urging. If the motion is agreed, we shall find out. It will then be for the House to approve or reject it after it has been considered in Committee and we have seen how detailed the support and opposition are and the grounds for both. Would not that be a more sensible way of proceeding?

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I do not agree with the conclusion that, although the Bill may have majority support in Southampton city council, it is perfectly legitimate for the council to claim that that is what it wants. Hon. Members do not have to say that, because a majority on Southampton city council wants the Bill, we must rubber-stamp it. Our job is to protect the broad interests not of Southampton city council but of the people of Southampton and all those who would say that the House must give its approval. The House is not being asked to rubber-stamp something that has been decided in Southampton; it is being asked to say that the measure should be agreed.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), I am not as opposed to the scheme as some of our colleagues are. However, based on my experience, I believe that we should not incur further expenditure at every stage of a Bill which probably will not receive the support of the House or be put into operation, thereby leaving the costs to be borne by the promoters.

In the case of the Ginns and Guttridge (Crematorium) Bill, one of the tragedies was that a relatively modest company put forward the proposal. The procedures of the House were allowed to continue. It was not the company's fault that it took years, but there were enormous costs. However, it was a commercial business. It went into the matter with its eyes open. It decided to put its own money forward, and it lost. This is a different situation. We are talking not about whether those who put money into the scheme for the so-called people mover will receive profits. That is definitely not a matter for discussion tonight; it is a matter for Second Reading. However, it is clear that the longer the Bill is allowed to run the greater will be the burden to be borne by the community charge payers of the city of Southampton. Members of Parliament are entitled to consider whether a proposal from a political party in a certain city should merit the support of the House when it will involve costs on people who clearly do not unanimously support that proposal.

The House would probably be willing to support a proposal for a tramway or a rapid transit system to alleviate the problems of people who wish to reach the city of Southampton and then go to their ultimate destinations. Such a scheme would have broad support across the political spectrum. I should be more impressed if some members of each party on the council were strongly in favour and some were opposed than if a scheme appeared to have only one-party support.

Mr. Snape: On the council.

Mr. Griffiths: On the council. Therefore, it would be even more difficult to raise the money necessary for the scheme to proceed and to make the Southampton community charge payers' investment worth while.

I am told that £0·75 million has already been spent and I am sure that not all the final bills are in. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) pointed out that a document, the authenticity of which I am not aware, refers to a sizeable tranche of public funds that are already committed. We are talking about large expenditure. There comes a point at which we should say, "Unless we are sure

that the scheme will be practical, we should say no." That is our responsibility—it is not to decide whether we want a horseshoe-shaped, circular or elevated scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has strong feelings on those points. However, with respect, they are not what we are deciding. We are deciding whether to encourage the scheme, knowing that it is highly controversial, has unbalanced political support and may never come to fruition. The scheme has fulfilled a valuable purpose. It has provided an opportunity to discuss a rapid transit scheme in Southampton. Much of the preliminary work will be borne in mind elsewhere and people will consider what has happened.

Mr. Snape: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. It is a little contradictory to talk about how much money has been spent on the Bill and then to say that there has been a valuable discussion. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. It would be expensive if we abandoned the scheme now. We would have had better value for money, to use the phraseology of the Conservative party, if we had used the ten-minute Bill procedure. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Bill began in the House of Lords, which is one reason why it has come to us so late as to need a carry-over motion.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I trust that I did not suggest that the expenditure that has been incurred has been wasteful. I am sure that I did not use that term, and I did not intend to imply it. I suggested that that is the amount that has been spent. We should always take advantage of what has been obtained from such expenditure. Work has been done surveying the route and on the examination of technical problems, and it could be adopted elsewhere. However, expenditure is not an argument for adopting the scheme. There comes a time when it is sensible to say, "Enough is enough. We went down the wrong route to start with." It is better to stop and use what can be learnt from mistakes and then to find a scheme that has broad support. An alternative scheme with broad support would cost less because of the work that has been done.

Hon. Members would be wise to reject the proposal and say that we are concerned not with the merits of the scheme but with the reputation of the House for encouraging a project that is likely to prove expensive and not come to fruition.

I sat through the Committee which considered perhaps the worst example that is possible. Since then I have consistently come to the House to support private Bills. I have supported carry-over motions and done my best to facilitate private Bills because I realise the risk and cost that promoters face. I have given my support because of my experience. But at the back of my mind I recognise that if only at an earlier stage someone had made it clear to Messrs. Ginns and Guttridge that their Bill would not go through the House after it returned from Committee because a solid block of people was determined that there would not be a crematorium on that site, a great deal of money and a great deal of the time of the House would have been saved. That would have improved the reputation of the House.

Tonight we have an opportunity to show that the House is a valuable safeguard for those who wish to make proposals which involve expenditure of public funds and which, although they may be good ideas, are badly thought out and presented. I hope that the House will reject the motion.

8.50 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): You may be intrigued, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a Member from Essex takes such a close interest in a revival motion which relates to the fine city of Southampton. If I may take a few seconds to explain, I was a resident of the city for almost six years. For a brief period I served on the city council. For those six years, I was a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). I take this opportunity to send my best wishes and regards through my hon. Friend to all my friends in Southampton, especially those in the opposition group on the city council and the many people in the Conservative party with whom I worked so closely and successfully for so long. I am sure that my hon. Friend will pass on those regards.

Mr. Snape: It took long enough to say.

Mr. Janman: I am willing to give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he so graciously did to me, if he wishes to make any point about what I am saying.

In addition to the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), it is important to stress that we are discussing not merely a revival motion but a revival motion for this Session. The whole crux of the debate is whether the House should see fit to revive a motion on a Bill which seeks to do something which will have a major, but not necessarily in any way positive, effect on the city of Southampton when it is clear that the overall feeling of the people of Southampton, expressed through different avenues—city councillors, county concillors and Members of Parliament—amounts to a democratic deficit, through whatever conduit one looks at the matter. There is clearly no proven democratic surplus in favour of the Bill coming back to the House.

On that basis, we should consider whether we wish to revive this motion when there is nowhere near unanimity in the city about the scheme. The Bill is specific. It would implement a specific rapid transit system in Southampton. As there is a wide range of views about the merits of the proposal in Southampton, it is worth spending some time on examining the reasons that lie behind the lack of unanimity.

I shall give six main reasons why there is so much discussion in Southampton, and no consensus, about whether the Bill should be revived. But there is one general reason. Two of my hon. Friends—one of whom is about to leave the Chamber and may wish to stay while I refer fleetingly to what he said—mentioned cities which are going ahead with or already have rapid transit systems.

My hon. Friend the Minister cited Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield—all British cities. Manchester and Sheffield are at least twice the size of Southampton, and Birmingham is between five and six times the size of Southampton. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) mentioned several cities. When I lived in Southampton, I lived not far from his constituency. I was only just a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Test. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside mentioned Toulouse, which is the third or fourth biggest city in France, with a population of well over half a million. He mentioned one

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or two other cities, and there was some debate about how accurate and detailed his knowledge of them was. Lille is considerably larger than Southampton.

The pertinent points about the two sets of examples given by my hon. Friends is that there is often a case for putting in some sort of rapid transit system in a city, irrespective of whether it is entirely privately funded, entirely publicly funded or funded with a mixture of finance. However, a certain concentration of population is necessary to make the scheme realistic.

In terms of population, Southampton is only just a city. I do not mean that disparagingly—I very much enjoyed the six years that I lived there—but its definition as a city or a big town is a borderline case. In conurbations the size of Southampton, a realistic proposal is rarely made for putting in a rapid transit system. In view of that, the proposal for Southampton would not be so bad if the proposed system served most of the city. It seeks to serve only a tiny area. I shall come to that later.

Furthermore, the proposed system does not use existing or old and disused British Rail track. It does not use natural transport corridors within the city. Unlike many other rapid transit systems which are running successfully, the Southampton scheme has not been initiated by the private sector. The whole idea has been initiated by the public sector—the Southampton city council. Those are some general reasons, as a preamble to my remarks, why I do not think it is realistic.

I come back to the reasons which underline the fact that there is a complete lack of unanimity in Southampton. Later I shall give the House some information about how one could construe that there is not in the city a democratic consensus in favour of the Bill being revived. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said, we are talking not just about a procedural matter but about whether we want the Bill to proceed, or whether we wish to extinguish it once and for all. If the House does not agree to revive the motion, we will effectively carry out the wish of the majority of the people in Southampton, who think that the rapid transit system should not proceed. Obviously it will not proceed if the House decides to extinguish this animal so that it does not continue to breathe.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is on dangerous ground. I do not believe that any comprehensive survey has been done to find out whether people are for or against the proposal. Certainly anecdotal evidence gained from people in my constituency and in Southampton suggests that people are divided, but I think that there is a general feeling in favour.

I had the opportunity to talk to taxi drivers about it. The Southampton taxi consultative council, representing radio taxis, the Southampton Taxi Owners Association and Streamline Taxis, had a general discussion and generally came down in favour of what is proposed. But no quantitative analysis has been done. Even if there had been, I remind my hon. Friend that as an elected representative he is on dangerous ground. I remind him of Edmund Burke's dictum that we are here to use our judgment and that we betray rather than serve the people we represent if we sacrifice it to their opinion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are beginning to drift into a Second Reading debate. We are dealing with a procedural motion as to whether the Bill should be revived or not.

Mr. Janman: Of course taxi drivers would be in favour of a rapid transit system, because they would earn a lot of money by taking people from the outskirts of the city to the centre so that they could get on the thing to whirl them round the periphery of the city centre. I am sure that the cab drivers would be licking their lips in anticipation.

Mr. Snape *rose*——

Mr. Janman: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I want to answer more fully the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, who wishes to leave the Chamber. As a former resident of Southampton, I believe that the scheme is laughable. Not only is there no need for it, but its overall effect on the city will be negative in many ways.

As to the proof about whether or not there is clear, democratic consensus and unanimity, let me give my hon. Friend some pieces of evidence which show that there is no unanimity or consensus. A recent telephone survey by a leading newspaper in Southampton, which covered about 4,000 people, had a 60 per cent. response in opposition to the scheme, certainly in the form specified by the proposed legislation.

A petition has also been organised, and already it has 5,000 signatures. My hon. Friend will know, from his experience in the House and in politics generally, that that is a large petition. It is difficult to find people to go out and get signatures. The fact that 5,000 have already been raised is interesting. My hon. Friend may not be aware that a street survey carried out in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) showed that 88 per cent. of those interviewed did not want the scheme.

Mr. John Garrett: May I ask the hon. Gentleman about the telephone survey about which he was so keen? Can he tell the House whether the place of residence of those telephoning was established during the survey? Would he care to compare it with the survey carried out by the London School of Economics, which showed an overwhelming majority in favour? Will the hon. Gentleman give us more details about the telephone survey and the notoriously unreliable system of carrying out surveys?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. At the risk of tedious repetition from the Chair, I remind the House once more that we are not discussing the merits of the Bill; we are discussing whether the Bill should be revived. I recognise fully that, in discussing that motion, it is necessary to refer to the Bill in order to construct an argument, but it is not in order to go into detail which would be in order on the Second Reading of the Bill, were we to reach it.

Mr. Janman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that guidance. I may be going into slightly too much detail in order to answer genuine interventions by colleagues.

May I recommend that the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) directs his question to a newspaper called *The Reporter*, which incorporates the *Southampton Guardian*? From the name of the newspaper, I presume that most of the people who read it live within the city

boundaries of Southampton. The newspaper says that the people who rang up were its readers. I remind the hon. Gentleman that 2,015 did not want the scheme and that only 1,743 did. It was *The Reporter*, No. 289, of Wednesday, 19 December 1990, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to consult the article. He could also contact the newspaper if he wants further details.

Mr. Michael Brown: As you rightly say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, surveys showing the number of people for and against the proposal are a matter for Second Reading. But does not my hon. Friend agree that what is relevant to the motion today is the people who will be adversely affected by the project? Is it not right to consider people such as Mr. A. Godsby, whose cafe will be knocked down? There are 18 similar properties in the road in which he lives, and they would all be wiped away. Therefore, does my hon. Friend agree that, although it may not be appropriate to consider whether the majority are in favour of or against the proposal, we should consider those who will have their properties flattened and be put out of business?

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend is right. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) referred to additional public expenditure, and there will have to be a considerable number of compulsory purchase orders in order to force people living in a supposedly free society to vacate their properties, whether domestic or commercial, in order to allow this rapid transport system to pass over what was their property.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Janman: I will in a moment.

My hon. Friend's intervention reminds me of a well-known Southampton resident called Mr. Knox who has a flat near where the elevated section will go. He is worried that it will go through his front bedroom.

Mr. Snape: I am belatedly grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am listening to him with great care, as his arguments are always well marshalled and his cogent thoughts always benefit the House. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) seems to be getting over-excited. To return to Mr. Knox and the cafe owner——

Mr. Michael Brown: It is going through his kitchen.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman says that with a delightful giggle. I am sure that that is amusing, but if the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) can persuade his hon. Friend to relax for a second or two, perhaps I can have his attention.

These matters are vital. If we accept the motion tonight, the petitioners, who will presumably include those who are to lose their homes, will have every right to put their case before a Committee. But if Southampton city council decided to build a ring road or any other road around the city centre, it could bulldoze as many houses as it liked under the compulsory purchase order procedure without any reference to the House, a Committee stage or any democratic involvement by the hon. Members for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). The reform of that procedure is long overdue. It applies only to public transport matters and to railway developments. A road development in the area could have gone ahead without any reference to the House.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing his intellectual integrity and rigour to bear in the debate. Hon. Members will note with interest what he has said.

Mr. Snape: Does the hon. Gentleman understand it?

Mr. Janman: I do understand the hon. Gentleman. His west midlands accent is not too strong. I always take note of what he says.

I do not want to take up too much more time, as I want to ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Test will have an opportunity to speak. Also, I am getting quite hungry. However, I have to say that, for six specific reasons, it would be better to reject this revival motion and thereby kill the Bill now. The six reasons—which are also the reasons for the lack of democratic consensus in Southampton—are: the cost, the damaging effects on the environment, public opposition, the damage to the city's fabric, the limitations of the proposed system, and the lack of proven need for the system as devised.

On the question of the provision of public money, we have already had a hint from the Government that taxpayers' money could be involved if the scheme were ever to see the light of day. The city council has consistently refused to write into the Bill a guarantee that public money would not be involved. Of course, local authority public money comes from community charge payers. Socialist councils seem to forget that they do not have any money of their own, that the money they spend belongs to their citizens. Therefore, any fanciful talk about funding such a scheme with money from the private sector, come what may, is, to say the least, misleading.

The route that has been chosen is absolutely useless. It skirts the city centre, connecting a lot of places that in themselves are fairly meaningless. If one looks at a map, one sees that it follows a sort of inner ring road. The job that this rapid transit system would do, at a cost of £40 million—probably £45 million by the time it was actually built—could probably be done by a few minibuses. The amount of money involved would be very much less, and such a system would be far more profitable.

The whole idea is deeply unpopular, but, in that regard, I do not intend to repeat the comments that I made following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside. There is clear evidence that a large number of people in Southampton are against this system. An elevated track would be disliked by the elderly, the handicapped and mothers with young children in buggies or prams.

The system is opposed by a number of environmental groups in the city—Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society, the Friends of Old Southampton, the City of Southampton Society, Southampton Conservation and Southampton Environmental Forum. Those bodies certainly want this revival motion blocked. They do not want to see 30-ft concrete pillars around the old part of the city centre, in front of the old city walls. They do not want the negative impact that it would have on the many parks in the city, with the consequent loss of flora and fauna and the undermining of the peace and tranquillity that one can enjoy on a summer Sunday afternoon.

There would be general pollution and increased traffic congestion, with people driving into the city to use the system. Taxi drivers in particular will want to see it there. It would destroy parts of the existing urban fabric, and

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generally create noise pollution, and damage many parts of the city, including the waterfront and other sensitive and historic areas.

Does it make transport sense? No. As I said earlier, and as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), it would not be integrated with British Rail. Southampton has eight stations. The system would not be integrated with bus or ferry services. Access to it would be mainly by car, so the volume of road traffic would be increased, rather than decreased, despite the fact that a decrease in the amount of traffic is what one normally assumes to be the objective of a rapid transit system.

I come back to the very important question of cost and of who is going to meet it. Already, £0·75 million has been wasted on this absurd monstrosity. As I said earlier, quoting the *Southern Evening Echo*, a secret memo, about which the city council would not have wanted the public to know, says that a further £176,000 of community charge payers' money would have to be spent if we were simply to allow this revival motion to pass. The construction cost has been estimated at £45 million, and the railway would need to achieve 11 million rides a year to make a profit —that in a city of only 220,000 people. The arithmetic does not add up, and the statistics are laughable.

I explained that the city council refused to give an absolute guarantee, to be written into the Bill, that the system would be totally privately funded. It knows in its heart of hearts that the scheme is not economically viable and could never be profitable, and that it is the poor old community charge payers who would have to pick up the tab for that white—or should I say red?—elephant.

The council's current position of intent is meaningless, unless it is prepared to inscribe it into the Bill. Because of the lack of enthusiasm and absence of unanimity, the system is unlikely to secure the patronage of the 35,000 passengers a day that it would need to be profitable. Southampton is a fine city and a major regional centre, but it has competition from Bournemouth, Portsmouth, and Winchester. Although Southampton has some tourist attractions, it is mainly an industrial city and is not a place that the public necessarily think of as one offering tourist attractions. I welcome the efforts made by the city council when I lived in Southampton, and now, to improve the city's appeal, but it is fanciful to claim that a little train travelling around the city's perimeter will make any difference to the number of tourists.

No developers or major retail stores are committed to the scheme, and it seems unlikely that they ever will be. The project would waste community charge payers' money; it would be silly of the House to agree to a motion concerning a rapid transit system that no one really wants. The city's two Members of Parliament, who are elected by a much bigger turnout of the voters than are Labour city councillors, also oppose it.

The scheme has been conceived by the public sector, and is not the product of an entrepreneurial venture from the private sector. It has sprung from the womb of public empire building, which is typical of Southampton's Labour council. The proposal is unpopular now, and the system would be even more unpopular once the population started living with its environmental effects. The system would be an appalling burden on the people of Southampton. I ask the House to defeat the motion.

9.14 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have had something to do with private legislation over the past five Sessions, since 1986. I appeared before the House on behalf of the promoters of the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill with a revival motion on not one, but two occasions. Perhaps you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recall the basis on which the Opposition made their case against that legislation—it was on their opposition as a matter of principle to revival motions. How they have stood on their heads tonight.

We heard a different story this time from the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) from when he spoke against the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. Oh what a difference when he appeared before the House to talk about the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. Oh what a difference when the shadow Leader of the House responded to the revival motion that I moved on that occasion, two and a half years ago. There he stood at the Dispatch Box, denouncing the motion to the House, and asking how a promoter, who had already used up the time of one or other House of Parliament, dare come back to waste the time of the House for yet another Session. Yes, they are the guilty men tonight—with their previous attitude about matters of principle and revival motions.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): He has gone round the bend.

Mr. Brown: I heard what the hon. Gentleman muttered under his breath. He said that I had gone round the bend. He is the one who has done a somersault. He is standing on his head. Two years ago during the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill, when he was the shadow Leader of the House, he stood at the Dispatch Box and said that, as a matter of principle, the House should never agree to such motions, regardless of whether the Bill had been considered in Committee.

Therefore, I expect to see the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, if not the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), in the Lobby with us tonight. I shall study *Hansard* closely tomorrow to see whether he has been consistent.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East also participated in the debates on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and used the argument of principle against a revival motion.

Mr. Snape: I am sorry to upset these flights of fancy —if not oratory—but will the hon. Gentleman consider the argument that I put to him earlier? This Bill is promoted by a democratically elected local authority and has completed all its stages in another place. The Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill was promoted by a board of directors and it had not gone through any procedures in another place. I hope that he will accept that there is a difference between local councils of any, or all, political parties and paid directors. That was the difference that I pointed out to him earlier, and so far he has failed to tackle that argument.

Mr. Brown: I shall let the hon. Gentleman have his argument. However, I wonder why he voted against the

revival motion for the Killingholme Generating Stations (Ancillary Powers) Bill for generating stations in my constituency. I think that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras also voted against it. That Bill could not be promoted by a local authority, but had to be promoted by the electricity companies. That Bill also passed through the House of Lords. During that revival motion I said that we should assent to it because it was the first opportunity for the House to consider the Bill. All those Opposition Members who are normally aficionados of revival motions when I move them, who incidentally seem to have disappeared tonight—I do not know where they have gone——

Mr. Dobson: They did not know that the hon. Gentleman was going to speak.

Mr. Brown: It is always very pleasant to have a large audience from the Opposition. I get quite used to it. With a bit of luck the Benches will fill up quickly in a moment when hon. Members see my name on the screen.

However, to return to the issue of principle, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East has come up with a novel idea. He says that the House should agree to a revival motion if a Bill is promoted by a local authority because it has some basis in democracy, but not if the Bill is not promoted by a local authority.

In the case of the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the Killingholme Generating Stations (Ancillary Powers) Bill, as local authorities do not run those organisations, they cannot promote them.

Opposition Members have thrown that principle at me in the past few years, and now they should get a taste of their own medicine. For tonight's purposes we should put their argument to the House, and ensure that they have an opportunity to vote on the same basis on which they voted before. We shall see what happens.

As you have rightly said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must not consider the Second Reading of the Bill tonight. What we must consider is the way in which the Bill is being presented. It is normal procedure for the promoters of a private Bill to engage parliamentary agents—in fact, they are required to do so. I make no complaint about that; all parliamentary agents, including those representing the promoters of this Bill, are well-respected and highly regarded organisations.

This Bill, however, has more than parliamentary agents to assist it. One would expect the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) to be in the Chamber, bearing in mind the reprimands that were thrown at me from both sides of the House—and, I believe, from the Chair on one occasion—when I was not in the Chamber during a debate on a private Bill of which I was in charge. But I see that the hon. Gentleman has returned. I hope that the sponsors of this Bill will engage in the sort of behaviour that was expected of me by the House, especially the Opposition. We must ensure that even-handedness and fair play are maintained.

It is, of course, right and proper that a Member of Parliament should also represent the promoters, presenting their case to the House, and the hon. Member for Norwich, South did that. But I wonder what the House would have thought if, when I moved the revival motion for the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill, an Opposition Member had held in his hand the plan of campaign drawn up by a public relations outfit explaining how to buy off hon. Members supporting the Southampton rapid transit proposals. I think that there would have been goodness knows what to pay. Opposition Members would have had plenty to say about public relations companies being up to their ears in it, and so forth.

I have news for the House. I have here a document suggesting the best way of securing support in the House, submitted to Southampton city council. It says: "Target Members of Parliament. Target the city's Back Bench MP James Hill." I do not know how you feel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the idea of targeting my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill).

Mr. Dobson: Scarcely precision bombing.

Mr. Brown: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment: he is mentioned in the document as well. Others, it says, include "Christopher Chope"—my hon. Friend the Minister. And so it goes on, with a litany of other hon. Members who could be nobbled.

The next part of the document deals with how to nobble Ministers and their civil service advisers. It names the relevant Departments as the Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade and Industry, and suggests that the key political figure is "Mr. Michael Portillo, Minister for Public Transport". I hope that Southampton city council will wonder whether it has received value for money, given the out-of-date advice with which it has been provided.

According to the document, the Transport Department's political adviser, Elizabeth Buchanan, should be approached. And so it goes on. Good heavens! I see that the Minister to whom I am Parliamentary Private Secretary is also mentioned, on the ground that—according to the document—he represents the Department of Trade and Industry. For the past three months, I have been going to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to assist the Minister there.

The document suggests that leading civil servants may also need to be approached to prepare the way for a ministerial meeting. Have his civil servants been leaning on my hon. Friend the Minister? Has he received any request for a ministerial meeting from those civil servants, on behalf of Southampton city council? I think that we need answers to those questions.

I am making a serious point. As well as the normal procedures, we have seen an outfit coming into play in the belief that it is possible to mislead the House. That may be why Southampton city council has been unwise enough to launch the revival motion: it imagines that it is a simple matter of engaging parliamentary agents—but I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the time has come to discuss how it was that the hon. Member for Norwich, South came to be the Bill's sponsor.

The document continued:

"We have already advised that the ideal Member to sponsor the Bill is James Hill. We are aware that he has been subjected to considerable pressure and that it may be that the best that can be achieved is for him to be persuaded to adopt a neutral stance."

The idea of my hon. Friend adopting a neutral stance is fanciful.

"In the event that Mr. Hill cannot be won over an alternative sponsor will need to be found."

A list of names follows, including that of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). He spoke, very sensibly, on the motion. The list goes on and on. The document continued:

[Mr. Brown]

"Whoever is chosen, a major priority of the project team will be to ensure that a proper brief is prepared with all the relevant issues adequately addressed.

I hope that the hon. Member for Norwich, South was properly briefed when he spoke this evening. His information does not seem to square with some of the information that we have received.

Mr. John Garrett: I can write my own speeches.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman says that he can write his own speeches. Southampton charge payers will want to know why on earth thousands and thousands of pounds are being spent on briefings and speaking notes when the hon. Gentleman admits that he can write his own speeches. The community charge payers represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Test are having to fund all this.

I should never have been a party to the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill if that sort of thing had gone on then. If any Opposition Member had discovered that the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill was being dealt with in the way that this Bill is being handled, he would have demanded to know what was going on behind the scenes —all the funny business and all the nobbling of Ministers, civil servants, special advisers and my hon. Friends. Finally, they had to nobble an Opposition Member to sponsor this Bill. They would have asked what was in it for me and what the Register of Members' Interests showed. It is funny how silent they all were.

Mr. Dobson: Would the hon. Gentleman have advised Southampton city council to do what Associated British Ports did, with his acquiescence—to organise a champagne party for everyone who was willing to stay up to vote for the Bill?

Mr. Brown: I thought the hon. Gentleman would come to that. You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when champagne was served to any of my hon. Friends who were kind enough to speak in the debate it was paid for by me out of my own pocket. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has mixed up that Bill with another Bill. I think that he meant to refer to the Felixtowe Dock and Railway Bill of five or six years ago. There were great celebrations both in the House and even more in my constituency when Royal Assent was given last year to the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Act. However, Associated British Ports did not pay for the champagne; I paid for it. One or two Labour Members were spied in the Smoking Room with half a glass of champagne in their hands, poured out by me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Champagne parties and Bills of many Sessions ago may be interesting, but they are hardly relevant to the proceedings this evening.

Mr. Brown: Where are the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer)? They would have had a great deal to say about funny business behind the scenes and about public relations companies nobbling Members of Parliament and Ministers. Where are they? Perhaps the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East can tell me.

Mr. Snape: I assure the hon. Gentleman that neither my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) nor my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) are drinking champagne, whether provided by the promoters or anyone else.

Mr. Brown: I do not doubt that for a moment. However, I would have expected them to be showing concern about the way in which this private Bill is being brought before the House. I would have expected them to express the same concerns as I have been expressing. If the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) were here, I am sure that he would have been apoplectic and unable to contain his rage—just as I and I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Test feel. We are extremely concerned at the way in which the Bill is being promoted.

I have given clear reasons why, on a matter of principle, we should not allow the revival motion to proceed. I have taken some leaves out of the Opposition's book and I hope that they will vote with me on the basis that all the arguments that I have deployed have been theirs on previous occasions.

9.35 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): This has been an engaging debate. Unfortunately, we have not heard much from the Opposition. I shall try to keep within the parameters of the debate. This is a revival motion. When one hears that word one imagines that the animal is nearly dead. This can be kept alive for ever by throwing community charge payers' money at it. Even if the Bill is defeated this year, another, could easily be brought forward. There is a phalanx of advisers, public relations men, solicitors, attorneys and parliamentary agents. Everything on which the £750,000 has been spent could be itemised, but I do not intend to do so because there is enough evidence without humiliating hon. Members who have been drawn into this by the lobby of the House.

I have some papers that were given to Southampton city council so that it would know all about the scheme. The instructions to the council say:

"There is no compulsion that the system must be built should the Bill receive the Royal Assent. However, Parliament requires to be satisfied that the proposed system is of sound concept in all respects and that Southampton city council is committed to the ultimate construction of the Southampton rapid transit system."

We have heard that the council is not committed to it. If it cannot find the investors, it will do nothing. Because the council could not achieve political harmony in its council chamber, all the money will be wasted.

I have begged the Bill's promoters for the past two years to withdraw the Bill and try to achieve political harmony and work towards a transport system that will serve the whole city. We should work on those lines, not on this esoteric construction in the sky which will simply look nice for the tourists. We need something for the people who have to travel to work in Southampton every day whether it is sunshine or showers.

The instructions go on:

"The parliamentary agent has advised that a large majority vote by the city council in favour of depositing the Bill should help the passage of the Bill through Parliament."

As I have said, we need co-operation.

"A small majority vote in favour or a vote split along party lines would cause concern in Parliament as would only limited support in the city for the Bill and the system."

We have heard that there is a split on party lines.

The company has already been set up and there is a horde of people who may be public relations people, a

project team, advisers or consultants. The Bill contains the power for the council to create a private sector company to run the system and alternative powers for it to dispose of or franchise the operation of the system to another body.

If the council is unable to find investors—I doubt that it will be able to do so—what is its only alternative? It must use enhanced land values in other parts of the city to finance the system. It did that for Citybus, which is now virtually owned by the local authority, and it will do exactly the same with this railway system.

Everyone agrees that the environment is a serious matter. There are five environment groups in Southampton. The Green party and the Liberal Democrats are against the rapid transit system. Labour may care to ignore Conservatives and say that they have no conception of the environment, but almost every environmentalist in Southampton is against the Bill. However, they can speak for themselves; they are very capable people.

The financial structure of the system is probably its most worrying aspect for Southampton's 207,000 citizens. We did not even know what it would cost until the House of Lords insisted on an estimate of expense. I have it here, and it is dated 30 November 1988. The elevated guideway is estimated at £12 million, easements at £2 million, stations at £5 million, one or two little odds and ends at only about £1 million—hardly worth mentioning—cars and vehicles at £14·4 million and purchase of land, minerals and permanent rights of way at £9·9 million. I have been hearing that it will cost only between £35 million and £45 million. That estimate, which was made two years ago, is £59·4 million. Its cost must have increased by at least 10 per cent.

We have been fighting a Bill about which only half-truths have been told. We were told something to keep us happy. The people of Southampton were not aware of what this system would do to the city. As I have asked many times, would any Member of Parliament, including my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Covin), allow such a train to be built in Winchester, Salisbury or perhaps even in Romsey? These trains are not suitable for areas of medieval England.

The Briway system could eventually cover the whole of Southampton, but not on an elevated track, which is three times as expensive as any other means of transporting trains. Hon. Members should recall their council days, when such expense always had to be pruned. No account is taken of the expense of this system. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was reported as saying at the Labour party conference that light railways have to be subsidised or they do not work. He gave the impression to a reporter from the *Southern Evening Echo*—he may deny it—that it was best for the Labour council group to wait until it had taken office, when it might be able to help with a pretty big subsidy. The hon. Gentleman broke into print——

Mr. Prescott *rose*——

Mr. Hill: I do not know whether the story was true or not, but that is what was reported. Anyone can say, several months later——

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman must know from his local paper that I corrected the story in a letter to the paper and in a letter to the council. I said that the reporter had got it wrong and the paper accepted that. As the hon. Gentleman must know, a statement was put in the press.

Mr. Hill: Indeed, I wrote a letter about the accusation against the hon. Gentleman. I knew that what he was basically saying was good socialist policy and he cannot deny it. It is good socialist policy to say that small railways do not pay, so we should subsidise them. That is what he was really saying at the conference.

We have heard a lot about finance. Whether the railway is subsidised is neither here nor there. We have been told that there will be some big investors. The local authority led us right up the garden path by telling us that Peter de Savary who, at that time, had just bought Eastleigh airport was going to provide a railway into Southampton to meet up with the people mover. Most of us know Peter de Savary pretty well. If he does not get planning permission, he moves on. In this case he received planning permission for Eastleigh and made a great business success of it.

Mr. Colvin: Then he moved on.

Mr. Hill: As my hon. Friend says, he moved on.

I wondered who would be the biggest investor in Southampton to think of taking on part or even the whole of the project. I asked the port manager of Associated British Ports Holdings about that and he in turn got in touch with Sir Keith Stuart. A letter was sent to me on 14 January 1991 which stated:

"Dear James, You asked me to let you know ABP's position so far as the proposed Southampton rapid transit project is concerned. It would seem that the project has quite some way to go"—

I agree with that wholeheartedly—

"before achieving tangible support from those organisations who might have a direct interest. ABP would be indirectly affected by the proposed rapid transit system but we do not have any significant involvement with the project at this time."

Again, that is a bit of a smokescreen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside talked about drawing up a prospectus. The local authority has drawn up a prospectus. It has tried to get money from investors, but it has failed abysmally. It has about £60,000 to do a little project. If people in the market place were considering putting money on the prospectus that Southampton city council has put forward, they would be well advised to go to their solicitors immediately because there is no security in this venture.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has just arrived, on time as always. I hope that he will not try——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One thing is certain. I have not come out of the Bar as I can tell that the hon. Gentleman has, with his red face.

Mr. Hill: You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will protect me from the accusation that I have come out of the Bar. I have been here all evening from 7 pm.

Mr. Colvin: It is not possible in law to write a prospectus without having secured the passage of a Bill through Parliament. That means that any so-called prospectus is not worth the paper on which it is written and cannot be judged as a prospectus.

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend has pointed out, as he did before, that no prospectus can be written until the passage of the Bill has been secured. But that has not stopped the

[Mr. Hill]

council trying to obtain money from almost everyone. When I first discussed the financial structure and all the various people clinging to it and sucking the substance out of it, it occurred to me that Arthur Daley might describe the scheme as "a nice little earner". It has been just that. Some £750,000 has been spent, much of it in officers' time. I believe that £33,000 has gone to a public relations firm, and a tremendous amount—more than £200,000—has gone to consultants. The whole thing is a mess of pottage. We must try to get shot of it tonight.

This is the first occasion on which we have debated the present Bill, but the more I read of what the local authority does, the more disturbed I become. I was born in the city of Southampton, and for two or three generations my family has admired that city. It is a terrible thing to see what the local council has done to it. I even asked the other day whether we should get the Prince of Wales down as a consultant to look at what is happening to our city. In architectural language, it is the big shed syndrome, and every big shed in Southampton looks as though it will not be there in 20 years' time. There is no planning as such.

The council has pushed ahead with the railway scheme. The difficulty is that it was allowed to get its way because there did not seem to be anyone who could stop it while it was telling half-truths. Now we are getting down to the nitty gritty. We have heard a lot of truth tonight.

Most hon. Members present will think that this is a parochial issue with which they should not get involved. I am grateful to my hon. Friends for supporting me tonight. It is as well that we are to vote on the matter shortly, and I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing us to go a little wider than is usual on a debate on a revival motion.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I know that my hon. Friend is concerned with Southampton and with the Bill, but it may interest him to know that the county of Cleveland has already spent more than £750,000 in respect of a similar project in Teesside which has not even got as far as the project that we are discussing. That shows how community charge payers' money is being squandered the length and breadth of the land.

Mr. Hill: I thank my hon. Friend.

I suppose that, in the end, every politician—whether he is elected by 25 per cent. of the electors or by 70 to 75 per cent., as is usual for most Members of Parliament—must safeguard the financial interests of those who put him here. If I were called upon to defend what I have done this evening, I would have to say that I have done it specifically to protect my constituents who pay the community charge.

9.53 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): As I explained in an intervention earlier, I am a member of the Select Committee that has been examining the whole question of light rail schemes, which will shortly be producing a report. Obviously I cannot say what will be in that report as that would be most improper. However, a great deal of the evidence has been made public, and I wish to place on record what I consider to be a fundamental point.

In an intervention I pointed out that light rail schemes are now being produced because they are the flavour of the month. Absolutely no regard is being paid to the amount of public money that is being poured out to consultants and others in order to produce schemes without ascertaining whether they are the right schemes for the area in question.

Far more important in relation to the House is the fact that, if we are to have every local authority producing its scheme and trying to promote its Bill, that will make it increasingly difficult for those authorities that have schemes that will work and be accepted to find the time to go through the parliamentary process.

So, in my submission, those who recklessly bring forward proposals such as this are doing no service to public transport in this country, to light rail schemes or to community charge payers. In effect, they are wasting Parliament's time when we might be concerning ourselves with much more important matters.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 49, Noes 138.

Division No. 55] **[9.55 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bottomley, Peter
Boyes, Roland
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Ingram, Adam
Lamond, James
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ruddock, Joan
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Walley, Joan
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*

Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hill, James
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Brown and
Mr. Tim Janman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to ask you a question about the Division. You will remember that for many years now the Government have claimed from the Dispatch Box neutrality on private Bills and stated that they would support any private Bill in a Division. You will recognise that in the Division tonight even members of the War Cabinet voted in the No Lobby to defeat a private Bill. Have you or the Clerks been notified of the reason why the Government destroyed the Bill tonight when previously they always claimed that their neutrality meant that they would support any private Bill before the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and the whole House know that the way in which right hon. and hon. Members vote is not a matter for the Chair—and a good thing, too.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Tonight we have seen once again the farce of the way in which private business is conducted in the House. Have you been notified of any intention to bring forward reform of private business at an early stage? It must be in everyone's mind what a farce it is for the War Cabinet to have to adjourn so that its members can come to vote on a private Bill. It is high time we got the new procedure into use and did away with this farcical procedure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may wish to read tomorrow's *Hansard*. In my hearing the Leader of the House dealt at length with the matter during business questions.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you cast light on the extraordinary suggestion that members of the War Cabinet have broken off their deliberations to come here to wreck a private Bill sponsored by a local authority to improve public transport in Southampton? Are you in a position to say whether the ideological crackpottery of the Conservatives has been taken to that length? Can someone tell us what sort of message is sent to the people serving in the Gulf when the order of priorities means that members of the Government come here specially to defeat a public transport proposal for Southampton?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The way in which right hon. and hon. Members vote has nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There have been attempts by the Government continually to obtain the consent and support of everyone for the war in the Gulf. Yet tonight the ideological prejudices and vendettas of the Government against a Labour-controlled local authority, which is promoting a private Bill through the procedure that it is bound to follow, have meant that they have broken off a War Cabinet meeting to come to the House to vote on the Bill. We should have a statement about the circumstances. Has any member of the War Cabinet intimated to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or asked your permission to make a statement to the House about the circumstances in which they place petty vindictive political advantage over what they consider to be the interests of the nation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has been no request for a statement. We must now get on with the business.

Parliamentary Pensions

10.11 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That this House endorses the proposals for improvements in Members' Pensions and Scheme Benefits to be contained in regulations under the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987.

Earlier today we had the Second Reading of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Bill. That dealt largely with the pensions, salaries and allowances of Ministers and office-holders. We now turn to the parliamentary pension scheme itself. There has inevitably been some overlap between the two in that several of the issues legitimately for this debate have already been raised in the previous one. The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) quite understandably covered the most important ones because they are of greatest interest to Opposition Members. I make no complaint about that. I understand fully why he did it and I was almost tempted to do it myself. I hope that it will save time now, because it means that I can be brief.

Until the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987 was enacted, the scheme was contained in statute. But that Act gave us the power to make changes by regulation. It is a requirement of the Act that I should consult the trustees on any proposed changes to the scheme, and my predecessor and I have been in close touch with them on the regulations before the House.

I should like now to pay a proper tribute—I had to move very fast at the end of the earlier debate, so was unable to do so—to the trustees and to their chairman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), for the sterling work which they put in on behalf of us all as Members of the House. I also join in the tribute to those in the Fees Office whom the right hon. Gentleman listed for what they do for us on pensions. I also thank the Treasury officials—I know that the Fees Office staff greatly value their assistance. I am pleased to be able to say that the regulations have been accepted by the trustees.

To move from statute to secondary legislation as a means of making changes to the parliamentary pension scheme means that the House may only reject or accept the relevant regulations. Because, however, of the need to be sure that the House has the opportunity to comment on any amendments, the Paymaster General, in May 1987, gave an undertaking that the regulations would be set before the House in draft so that hon. Members might make their views known and have them taken into account. That is the purpose of the motion. The regulations themselves are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

The regulations make certain improvements in Members' early retirment arrangements and some changes in relation to Members of the European Parliament. They provide that Members who have accrued the maximum pension will cease to make contributions. They double the death in service gratuity in a way that will cover all those Members who, sadly, have died during this Parliament. They increase widows' and widowers' pensions from half rate to five eighths and they empower the trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund to appoint an agent to acquire and dispose of the assets of the fund on their behalf. I doubt whether the House would want me to cover them all in detail, but I should be happy to cover points at the end of the debate.

As the right hon. Member for Salford, East said, the proposals on widows' pensions, death in service benefits and the problem of excess contributions are all common to many other schemes. They are fair and modest and are to be welcomed generally. Others are technical and come into the category of what I might describe as tidying up.

I would, however, like to make two general points. First, the main benefits operate from 6 April 1988. That I believe is right. It means that they start broadly from the point at which the TSRB recommended them, and the Government accepted the recommendation. It would not have been fair in any way to disadvantage the widows of colleagues who, sadly, are no longer with us because of delays for other reasons in implementing the decision.

Secondly, I want it to be clear, as my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) pointed out in the earlier debate, that the benefits are being funded from within the scheme itself. As he said, they effectively come from the last actuarial surplus. The reason for stopping at a five eighths widows' pension is that that, together with the other improvements, exhausted the surplus. Hon. Members will want to be aware that if and when the surplus is exhausted—I say if and when—contributions would have to rise to pay for those benefits.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): In the earlier debate we talked about surpluses and the Treasury's contribution. I understand that if we had a surplus the Treasury's contribution would be less. Therefore, would the surpluses have been available if the Treasury had made a proper contribution and not the 4·5 per cent. that it contributes now?

Mr. MacGregor: The system was operated according to the present rules. However, as a result of discussions, there was some contribution to benefits as well as the change that was made to the Treasury contribution. The hon. Gentleman will know from our earlier debate that we are now proposing to take that issue to the TSRB. We explored that in some detail.

Judging from the representations that I have received and the comments earlier this evening of my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), to whom I listened carefully, the main point of contention left relates to former MEPs. Let me be clear what the issue is about. The background is that we have two pretty well identical pension schemes for MPs and MEPs. We are proposing to allow years as an MEP to count as service in the House for the purpose of the early retirement scheme in future and vice versa. What we agree to do here we will also implement for the MEP scheme. In other words, the symmetry will be maintained.

The only question is whether the years of service in the other Parliament should be those after the point at which the regulations are approved, or whether all years of service in either place should be included when an MEP comes here or an MP goes to the European Parliament.

That is a narrow issue, peculiar and particular to the parliamentary pension schemes. It is important to stress that. It is not an issue which ranges more widely to other pension schemes or arrangements. The point is also a fine

one and arguments can be advanced on either side. The cost will have to be met from the fund and it must be very small.

I do not want to go into all the details this evening if I can avoid doing so. I hope that it is sufficient for me to say that, on balance, I am prepared to look sympathetically at the representations that I have received and my objective will be to accommodate them.

Finally, I should say something about the costs of these measures. The additional cost of all these changes to the total standard contribution is about 2·25 per cent. The total standard contribution, on current estimates, would need to rise, were it not for the surplus, to 22·25 per cent. As I made clear in my speech earlier this evening, one disadvantage of the approach to funding the scheme which the trustees have said they favour is that Members' contributions could fluctuate—perhaps wildly—and if the total contribution were to increase to pay for extra benefits, that cost would automatically be split, pro rata, between right hon. and hon. Members and the Exchequer. We do not need to take decisions on that now. We shall, of course, have an opportunity to take stock of the position after the next Government Actuary's department report is published and when the TSRB has reported. I intend then to hold a debate, which will allow the House to express its views on both reports.

As I said earlier, we need now to get the new arrangements into operation so that the benefits can be paid. Once the House has expressed its opinion on these regulations, I intend to lay them formally and they will come into force 21 days later. I commend the motion to the House.

10.22 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I do not want to delay the House unduly. However, there are a few points that need to be mentioned. I refer, in particular, to the basis on which our pensions are calculated. Some years ago, it was recommended that our salaries should be based on a certain civil service spine. Then the TSRB suggested that we should receive 85 per cent. of the salaries on that spine. In other words, we were to get 15 per cent. less than we expected. In addition, we had to make a pension contribution of 9 per cent., whereas civil servants, including some Treasury officials who were pressing for the system that was to be applied to us, and whose salary scale was close to ours, had a non-contributory pension scheme. We were told that it was a question of what part of the spine the civil servants were on.

We are losing out on two counts. First, whereas civil servants have a non-contributory pension scheme, we have to pay 9 per cent. Our salaries would be higher were it not for the fact that those of civil servants are not reduced by way of pension contributions. Secondly, we receive only 85 per cent. of the civil servants' rate. It is time that these issues were examined in great depth and detail, and a look should be taken at recommendations that have been made in the past. I recommend that we should be put on the scale of first secretary or secretary.

For the first time ever, the Government are providing for ministerial redundancy pay. Indeed, Ministers and others will receive two pensions. In this context, let us consider the obvious inequities of the resettlement grant for Members of Parliament generally. Surely common justice demands that those inequities be removed before redundancy pay for Ministers is introduced. Why should it be so simple to introduce legislation to benefit yourself, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, Ministers and others? Why should that group have pensions paid immediately, whereas ordinary Members of Parliament must wait for recommendations to go to the TSRB?

Mr. MacGregor: The Bill is based on the TSRB's recommendations of two years ago—but I am proposing, on resettlement grounds, that the TSRB should reconsider that aspect.

Mr. Powell: I thought that I had emphasised that it would be a simple matter for you to institute. It seems to me rather selfish that you——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Powell: I mentioned you, Mr. Speaker, because you would be covered by the provisions of the Bill. Therefore, it seems selfish to introduce that benefit for Ministers and others, whereas the rest of us will have to wait.

I accept the point made about the TSRB, but I remain sceptical because we are all under the impression that we would be on a spine with the civil servants, but then we learned from the TSRB report that the proportion of salary allowed was 85 per cent. and not 100 per cent.

I acknowledge the right hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks, but the 9 per cent. that we pay into the scheme and the Treasury's miserly 4·4 per cent. should be re-examined, so that the Treasury's contribution is at least compatible to that which would be made by a private business outside the House.

10.25 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I want to avoid covering old ground and delaying the House unduly, but I feel strongly not only at a personal level but on behalf of many Members of Parliament, past and present. The House should record its gratitude for the work done by the Committee chaired by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and its thanks for the clarity of the proposals from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in trying to achieve progress. This issue is one that tends to be long neglected, but the only people who suffer are Members of Parliament, when they retire.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) clearly spelt out the reasons for the mess in which we find ourselves. He knows full well that it was a late-night deal, cobbled together because the House would not accept the recommendations on right hon. and hon. Members' pay —and it has created a number of complications.

It is relevant to make comparisons with schemes available to others. There can hardly be a scheme anywhere else in the country in which the employer's contribution is half that made by the employee, which places us in a special category. Either we can trust the contributions made by the Treasury and right hon. and hon. Members, or we must look for improvements to the existing scheme.

Some might ask why the scheme should be improved, because Members of Parliament are, in comparison with many others, reasonably well paid. Despite the improvements made in recent years, many right hon. and hon. Members may be surprised to learn how small a

[Mr. Peter Fry]

percentage of their final pay they will receive as a pension when they retire. If I am fortunate to be re-elected and to reach my 65th birthday, I will have been a Member of Parliament for 26 years. One might imagine that length of service would entitle one to a full pension, but even after buying the extra number of pension scheme years that I am allowed, my pension will reach only 52 per cent. of my final pay.

Why are Members of Parliament different from people in other occupations? I shall try to give the Leader of the House a strong reason.

Earlier this evening I was talking to a colleague, who pointed out that when he came to the House he was earning twice the salary of a Member of Parliament. He had reached that moment in life when he was starting to earn a good salary and to progress, but he voluntarily gave it up to accept what was effectively half pay. Some people would say that that was his choice. But, just as in the age of noblesse oblige, I believe that an employer should be judged in the way that he treats his servants. Therefore, the Government should be judged on how it pays those who give public service. If we give excellent public service pensions to the civil service, on a non-contributory basis, surely we deserve some consideration when we contribute 9 per cent. of our pay.

A large number of hon. Members have given many years service, and have deliberately given up the opportunity to earn a lot more money. That peculiarity should be recognised. Although it has been said that we should not make comparisons with other Parliaments in other parts of the world, many of them recognise that relationship, and have a much shorter qualifying period before a Member of Parliament can obtain a full pension. I hope that that will be considered.

Although I welcome the increase in the widow's pension, I cannot for the life of me understand why we have not gone for the full two thirds widow's pension. That is allowed under the present tax regulations and is accepted in every modern pension scheme, but we deliberately pitch the widow's pension a bit below that level. It is not us who will suffer, but our widows—those wives who have to put up with a Member of Parliament as a husband and suffer all the privations and problems that wives often do. If there is any area where we should do the maximum that we can, then it is in helping the widows of former hon. Members. When this issue is next considered, I hope that that figure will be upped to the full two thirds.

Finally, like the hon. Member for Ogmore, I must refer to the question of resettlement grant. I understand that the normal retirement age is 65, and one's 65th birthday is a watershed. However, virtually everyone else in the country has some degree of choice about when they retire. This Parliament may be atypical, but when a Parliament runs on for longer than expected a number of hon. Members will lose the resettlement grant, whereas they would have received it if the election took place this summer or autumn, for example. This is not a very supportable case and the amendment, tabled and signed by more than 300 hon. Members, which would allow Members to take the grant, as long as they retired at the election after their 65th birthday, is acceptable.

Before I sit down, I should like to ask the Leader of the House a few questions about the resettlement grant. Under the present scheme, what would happen if an hon. Member realised that the general election would be after his 65th birthday, and he applied for the Chiltern Hundreds on the day before his 65th birthday? First, what would happen if he did that voluntarily? Secondly, what would happen if he had a medical certificate which said that he should not continue as a Member of Parliament? We all know that a number of hon. Members are looking forward to the day when they can retire, but they stay so that there will not be a by-election. Ideally, in their own interests, some of those hon. Members should go a little earlier. If we are not going to get outselves into a terrible muddle over this, we must have a clear sign that the settlement grant will be paid on a fair basis—at the nearest date to an hon. Member's 65th birthday, whether it is just before or just after.

I am grateful for the improvements that have been made to the scheme, but they have taken a long time to come. However, in all honesty, I am not completely satisfied, and I think that many hon. Members appreciate that much more needs to be done if we are to give hon. Members and their dependants the pension scheme perhaps not just that we deserve, but the one that we pay for.

10.34 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I had hoped to speak earlier, but let me now put on record my strong support for what was said by my right hon. Friends the Members for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I especially welcomed their concern for widows and widowers, and for Members who, having served in the House for several years, might receive little in the way of entitlement. I also agreed with what was said by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the imbalance between Treasury contributions and ours.

For the first time, I have an interest to declare. As a former MEP, I am obviously concerned about the eight years in which I served in the European Parliament. I thank the Leader of the House for his opening comments, and I am glad that he is going to examine what we consider to be an anomaly in the treatment of Members of Parliament and MEPs.

The schemes were originally designed to be identical, and many of us supported that strongly: we wanted salaries and pensions to be the same in both Parliaments. We argued against a "Euro-salary", believing that, because Members belonged to their own countries, they should be governed by national conditions in those countries. It was a matter of regret to us when the early retirement provisions departed from that principle, and a matter of satisfaction when a change was proposed—although those of us who had already served in the European Parliament were left in a rather peculiar position. It would certainly be difficult for us to accept being relegated to an even smaller group of people disadvantaged by the timing of the measures if we were joined in future by former MEPs who were able to benefit.

I thank the Leader of the House for his willingness to reconsider the matter. It is a small problem that can easily be cleared up, but it is very important to those of us who are in that small category.

10.36 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Let me associate myself with everything said by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), both about the wider issue and about a position that affects no more than a dozen or so hon. Members who have served in the European Parliament.

It is always invidious to make special pleas on behalf of oneself, but I honestly do not think that we are asking for a concession. We merely feel that we should be treated in exactly the same way as other hon. Members who have been members of the pension fund throughout. It should be remembered that, as Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan was instrumental in determining that MEPs should be paid precisely the same salary, and have precisely the same pension terms, as Members of Parliament. I would not have it otherwise; I think that his decision was entirely correct. The early retirement provision contains a curious anomaly. We merely want to ensure that we are treated in the spirit of Lord Callaghan's proposal—made, I believe, at a summit meeting many years ago.

I, too, thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for the way in which he has approached the matter. I also thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) for his generous remarks. Lest there be a scintilla of doubt, let me make it clear—as the Parliamentary Private Secretary to whom he referred—that what he said came as a complete, albeit pleasant, surprise to me, and that I did not put him up to it!

I again thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, on behalf of a very small group of hon. Members who simply ask to be treated in the same way as every other Member of Parliament.

10.39 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The House will be grateful to the Leader of the House for his succinct remarks in opening the debate.

I set out in some detail the views of the managing trustees in our earlier debate on Second Reading. There are some questions that remain unanswered and I know that the right hon. Gentleman will respond to them by correspondence as soon as he can. All I would emphasise again now is that the trustees most strongly pressed for a two thirds widow's pension and that we shall continue to argue for that further change in the scheme.

The improvements for which the regulations provide are, of course, mainly in keeping with what my fellow trustees and I have long advocated. We must now hope that the Top Salaries Review Body will be as intelligently responsive as the Leader of the House to the further improvements we have been seeking.

10.40 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I have to declare two interests that relate to different points. First, we should not regard the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Government as representing the taxpayers' interests and the rest of us as representing our own, or those of our potential widows or widowers. All of us are the taxpayers' representatives. I should prefer the trustees and the board to hear at least one person say that the 9 per cent. contribution is fair and reasonable, so long as the benefits for pensioners continue to improve, whenever that is thought sensible. I should much prefer to see a larger-than-usual deduction from my salary so that the accrual of pension entitlement reflects the genuine conditions that affect most people when they enter Parliament.

It is possible to become a Member of Parliament before one reaches the age of 30 and for some Members to serve until they are 65 and to get close to the maximum entitlement, but that does not apply to most hon. Members. I should prefer an increase in the pension entitlement to be made available before 65. Anyone who has served as a Member of Parliament for 20 years or so and who chooses to go should be able to do so on full pension.

The regulations make a great deal of sense. I hope that Members of Parliament will continue to ensure that those hon. Members who are not as well off as others manage to make reasonable provision for their widows and children. What has happened during the past year, with younger Members of Parliament dying, provides us with a reminder that there is much private misery. However much the Members' fund may be able to help some, it is far better that there should be entitlements—which are some of the best in the country—so that people do not suffer unnecessarily if death overtakes an hon. Member at an early age.

10.42 pm

Mr. MacGregor: I can respond briefly to the debate. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) knows, salary questions are not a matter for this debate. He referred to pensions and benefits. The question of the balance of contributions is, as he knows, going to the Top Salaries Review Body, as is the resettlement grant.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) that we do not have particularly generous arrangements for ourselves, but we must be careful when voting about our own terms and conditions—hence the importance of ensuring that issues are referred to the TSRB for its recommendations. It is the TSRB recommendations which we have debated, both earlier today and now.

My hon. Friend referred to the resettlement grant. One peculiarity of service in this place is that we cannot choose when we shall retire. That is usually decided at a general election. If he was here this afternoon, he will know that I made that point.

My hon. Friend said that he hoped that we could move swiftly to a two thirds widow's pension. He asked why it was five eighths. I said in my opening remarks that that was agreed with the trustees because it brought us to the limits of the actuarial surplus that was then being discussed.

I am afraid that I have to disappoint my hon. Friend about one point relating to the resettlement grant. Under the present arrangements, or those suggested in early-day motion 299, that would not be available for those who seek the Chiltern Hundreds. So those of my hon. Friends or anyone else who might be tempted to exercise leverage by applying for the Chiltern Hundreds to secure a resettlement grant would not succeed in getting the arrangements changed because it does not apply in those circumstances.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) raised one or two points in the earlier debate. I am sure that he will forgive me and understand why I did

[Mr. MacGregor]

not comment on them in the swift reply that I had to give to the debate. From memory, the one point that he wanted me to address was whether the House would be able to debate anything that came from the TSRB whether or not the Government came forward with regulations. I am sure that that can be dealt with through the usual channels if and when it arises, but at this stage it is a hypothetical question.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and the House will agree that the fact that I have moved fast in putting the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Bill to the House, implementing the earlier TSRB recommendations, and in putting as a matter of urgency to the TSRB the two points on which the House has today expressed particular concern, will show that I want to advance and settle the issues. One way of helping in that is to approve the motion now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House endorses the proposals for improvements in Members' Pensions and Scheme Benefits to be contained in regulations under the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987.

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL

Motion made, and Question put,

That it be an Instruction to Standing Committee B that it have power to amend the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill so as to make, in relation to the whole of the United Kingdom, provision for and in connection with the exercise of investigation powers by persons other than constables.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Mrs. K. Morris

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

10.46 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I do not wish to detain the House for too long, but the case I have to put to the Minister is very important. I will be interested to hear her reply.

It relates to a constituent of mine, Mrs. Morris, who lives in a village called South Anston. She has a son, Simon, who is a spastic quadraplegic and is obviously severely handicapped. Before 1989, she received the higher rate attendance allowance, severe disablement allowance, mobility allowance and, from 1985, the invalidity care allowance for caring for Simon. In 1989, Simon got a place at a residential school near Huddersfield. Obviously, Mrs. Morris expected a change in her income, but because she had to care for Simon at weekends, in school holidays or if he was ill, she was not able to get a job. She had to be available to care for Simon at any time and all times. Mrs. Morris understands that and accepts that her benefit would change when she is not actually caring for Simon.

The problems with receipt of her invalidity care allowance began when Simon was home for an occasional weekend—that is, when weekends either side of one spent at home were spent at school. On those weekends, she was refused invalid care allowance, even though she was receiving attendance allowance. Mrs. Morris felt aggrieved at her treatment, and lodged an appeal against the decision not to pay invalid care allowance. Although the tribunal was sympathetic, it turned down her appeal for payment on those weekends, even though she cared for Simon for up to 66 hours on those occasions.

I have a detailed schedule of the times Mrs. Morris has cared for Simon. In the week commencing Sunday 29 October 1989, Mrs. Morris cared for Simon for 31·5 hours; in the week beginning 12 November 1989, she cared for him for 33·5 hours; in the week beginning 26 November 1989, she cared for him for 32·5 hours, and in the week beginning 3 December 1989, she cared for him for 33·5 hours. Those times were for Fridays and Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

On all those occasions, she received two days attendance allowance, but the regulations for invalid care allowance specify that, in a week that runs to Saturday midnight, Mrs. Morris must have cared for Simon for 35 hours. Even if she might have looked after him for 66 hours over the weekend, the fact that it does not amount to 35 hours on either side of Saturday midnight means that she is denied benefit.

This case was originally brought to my attention in October 1990 by Paula Walker, who is a community worker in the advice section of the Church of England Children's Society in Maltby in my constituency. It is a worthwhile project that not only runs activities such as play groups and summer play schemes but gives good advice to my constituents when they are in need. Paula Walker wrote to me and rightly pointed out the inflexibility of the regulations for claiming invalid care allowance.

In November last year, having spoken to Paula Walker and Mrs. Morris, I wrote to the Secretary of State asking him to use his discretionary powers to grant Mrs. Morris

invalid care allowance payments on the weekends when Simon is home. The reply that I received from Lord Henley was, as he acknowledged, disappointing. He said:

"I am sorry that Mrs. Morris finds that the strict interpretation of the 35-hour rule is causing problems for her, but a provision in the Social Security Act 1975 defines a week as a period of 7 days beginning with midnight between Saturday and Sunday. I do appreciate that caring for a disabled person is not an easy task. It is certainly not our intention to make it difficult for carers to get ICA: we are anxious that as many carers as possible satisfy the qualifying criteria but the regulations do not allow for discretion in this matter."

Like Mrs. Morris, I believe that that bureaucratic trap is nonsense. There is no reason why invalid care allowance cannot be as flexible as attendance allowance.

Will the Minister review the regulations and introduce an element of discretion, so that Mrs. Morris can receive payment of invalid care allowance for the time that she is looking after Simon, which is only what she is entitled to?

10.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on his success in the ballot and on eloquently raising the case of his constituent, Mrs. Morris.

Although the subject of the debate concerns the case of an individual, it raises points of wider interest, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on them. I shall do my best, in the time available, to address the issues that the hon. Gentleman has brought to the attention of the House and of the Government.

My reply, therefore, will range more widely than the present rules of one benefit in an individual case, although I shall address the points that the hon. Gentleman made. I should describe the background of the Government's wider policy on community care and the social security benefits that are provided for those who need care and say something about our record on that policy. I shall then address myself to the rules that must necessarily frame any benefit scheme, which in a few cases act in ways that appear contrary to the spirit of the scheme.

First, I shall try to fit invalid care allowance into the wider picture of community care. To do so, I must give an indication of the resources that are devoted to helping many people in circumstances similar to those of Mrs. Morris and Simon through the Government's policy on community care and, through social security, to disabled people and the people who care for them.

Community care has been a large and growing part of local and central Government expenditure for more than a decade. Our commitment to it is beyond doubt, and a significant increase in social services expenditure—a 45 per cent. real terms increase between 1979 and 1990—is proof of it. April will see the implementation of phase 1 of the community care policy, as set out in the White Paper "Caring for People". That policy will be implemented in the context of a local authority settlement for 1991-92, which provides personal social services with the best increase in financial provision in 15 years. Only a few days ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment confirmed details of that settlement, which allows for a standard spending assessment for social services of £4,503 million. That represents a cash increase of more than 23 per cent. over the current year.

The Government recognise the contribution of informal carers to community care, as evidenced by the initiative of improving community care services. One of the six key objectives in the White Paper "Caring for People" is

"to ensure that service providers make practical support for carers a high priority. Assessment of care needs should always take account of the needs of caring family, friends and neighbours."

The White Paper recognises that carers need help in maintaining their valuable contribution to the spectrum of care and with services that respond flexibly and sensitively to their needs, greater involvement in the development of services, advice and support as well as practical services and improved access to information about facilities.

I know that many carers give generously of their time and energies. I listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech with admiration for his constituent, Mrs Morris, and for her son, Simon. I am sure that other hon. Members present were similarly impressed by Mrs Morris's devotion and commitment and, I was going to say, "simple hard work", but I understand that caring for Simon can never be merely simple.

Before moving from the general to the particular, I must say something about the proper role of personal benefits for people with disabilities and their carers. We have been looking at benefit provision for people with disabilities very carefully recently. The Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill, which I am at present involved in steering through Parliament, is a good example of our commitment to developing and extending provision for disabled people living in the community. It takes a fresh look at benefits for a wider range of disabilities than hitherto, just as the community care plans look to providing better services for individuals and their carers on an even wider spectrum than before.

The proposals in our White Paper "The Way Ahead" as a whole give £300 million extra help to 850,000 people. Nearly 300,000 people will gain as a result of the restructuring of attendance allowance for the under-65s and mobility allowance to form the new disability living allowance, at a cost of £240 million by 1993-94.

A new benefit called disability working allowance will go to about 50,000 people, at a gross cost of £85 million, which will be broadly offset by savings elsewhere. These plans are welcomed by those needing care, by those who care for them, by their supporters and by professionals in the field. Indeed, it may be that Mrs. Morris's son Simon will benefit from the improvements that we are making now for disabled people to live in the community.

For the immediate future, we will remember the statement on the uprating of benefits made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in October and the improvements and increases in provision it contained not only for disabled people and their carers, but for handicapped, sick and elderly people who live in the community.

Making the most effective use of our benefit resources is and will continue to be, for this and any responsible Government, a matter of great importance. Our primary aim with invalid care allowance, which is the subject of the hon. Gentleman's Adjournment debate, remains that of the Labour Government who introduced the benefit in 1976. It is to provide help in maintaining the income of someone who gives up the opportunity of full-time work to provide regular and substantial care to a severely disabled

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

person. To achieve that aim, the legislation and regulations that move those policy principles out of the world of good intentions and into the world of action set out the necessary rules.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the principal conditions are that the severely disabled person is someone in respect of whom there is payable attendance allowance or constant attendance allowance; that, to be treated as engaged and regularly and substantially engaged in caring for any week, the carer must show that he is, or is likely to be, engaged and regularly engaged in that caring for at least 35 hours in that caring week; and that the carer is between the normal ages for employment—that is, between 16 and pensionable age—and that he or she is in neither full-time education nor gainful employment. In other words, by caring for 35 hours a week, that carer has given up the possibility of full-time earnings. The provision is not a payment for caring services; it is directed towards the maintenance of income.

I am aware that I have given a somewhat exhaustive analysis of the benefits that we have introduced, but the tests are aimed——

Mr. Barron: On the specific point about the 35 hours, Mrs. Morris receives attendance allowance, so that is clearly more flexible in its application than invalid care allowance. She receives a full day's payment of attendance allowance on a Friday when she receives Simon at home, or collects him from his education establishment, at, say, 3 pm. Surely the simple thing would be to shift the midnight deadline and apply the provision to 35 hours in any seven days. Would not that be one way of helping Mrs. Morris, who does not have the opportunity to go out to work? If Simon fell ill tonight, for example, Mrs. Morris would receive a telephone call and she or her husband Roy would have to go to Huddersfield and bring Simon back home, because he has to be looked after independently of other people.

The Minister should agree to table amendments to the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill, which is to be considered in the House next Thursday, to shift the tight 12 o'clock deadline. I do not think that any hon. Member would argue against such a proposal. No matter which Labour Government introduced the provisions, no one could possibly want to deny Mrs. Morris that payment for looking after Simon.

Miss Widdecombe: First, let me disabuse the hon. Gentleman of his belief that it would be possible to table amendments concerning invalid care allowance to the Bill that is currently before Parliament. Invalid care allowance is not dealt with in that Bill, and it therefore could not be amended to influence the allowance. That would require new primary legislation. I do not wish to make a technical point about that tonight, but we could not do that even if we wished to.

The problem of the midnight division is simple. If we put that division somewhere else—on Sunday night or Monday night—people other than Mrs. Morris would have difficulties. They would include those who care for people who may be discharged from hospital on short stay. There is no guarantee of when such patients may come out of hospital; that, too, could fall either side of the line.

I appreciate that the watershed is a problem. However, it may interest the hon. Gentleman to know that, in the year to May 1990, 35,800 invalid care decisions were made. Of those, 270 were referred for further investigation on the basis of the 35 hours criterion and the relationship of the 35 hours to intermittent, as opposed to constant, caring. Of those 270, 120 were eventually unsuccessful. In other words, only 0·34 per cent. of total invalid care allowance applications were unsuccessful. Clearly, considerable sympathy is exercised in trying to assess whether people are eligible.

I must stress that the aim of the benefit is to provide maintenance of income. Suppose that we did what the hon. Gentleman suggested. Suppose that we did not draw a line at all and said that the 35 hours could start anywhere, in any old seven days. If we did that, there would be a danger that we might be talking about someone caring only over the weekend and maintaining a full-time job during the week. The benefit is specifically designed to help people who cannot do that—to help people of earning age who are not in education and who could go out to work and bring in a reasonable income if—and only if—they did not have to care for someone for 35 hours. That is the basis on which we decided on the 35 hours, which is roughly equivalent to a working week. We are trying to measure the working week against the time given for caring.

Hon. Members will be aware, however, that the bar on gainful employment is not absolute. Carers may establish or maintain a link with employment without losing their entitlement to invalid care allowance. They can earn £20 a week, after allowing for reasonable expenses such as fares to work, and those earnings do not affect their entitlement to ICA.

Similarly, a carer can take the opportunity of an educational course for a limited number of hours to remain in contact with the world outside the one of caring. So, although there are strict guidelines about the number of hours and when they are to be counted from, there is also that flexibility built in for people who do intermittent caring and have some free time, for example, during the week to take advantage to a limited extent of earnings or education.

We have, in fact, since its introduction in 1976, widened the scope of ICA to non-relatives of the disabled person in 1981 and to the large number of married women carers in 1986. The net result is that the scheme has grown from 5,000 recipients at a cost of £4 million in 1978-79 to an estimated 130,000 carers costing £229 million in 1990-91. Very recent improvements in the attendance allowance rules are the extensions last year to children under two and for the initial six months of a claim for people with a terminal illness, which will also mean that more carers can qualify for ICA. So I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are certainly not trying to restrict or diminish ICA in any way.

As well as extending the range of carers who can benefit from invalid care allowance, we have been able to improve the conditions under which it is paid. Last April, the earnings limit was increased from £12 to £20 a week, and it will increase again this April to £30. As with other benefits, the amount of benefit has been consistently uprated in line with inflation.

Another significant improvement for carers was introduced last year. For carers receiving the income-related benefits, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was pleased to introduce last October a carer

premium of £10 a week, which is expected to help 30,000 people. That too will be uprated in April. Moreover, in October this year, the premium will continue to be paid for up to eight weeks after caring ceases, which helps ex-carers to make the transition back into employment. All these are important developments. We have aimed at flexibility in the provision of services and benefits in so far as it is administratively and financially possible to do so.

The carer does not have to provide care every day of the week but must be caring regularly for at least 35 hours a week. The Government consider that that is a sensible way of measuring the degree of care provided; a degree of commitment which, as I have stressed, deprives the carer of the opportunity of full-time work.

Mr. Barron: I know exactly what the regulations say, but I am still not absolutely clear on this point. Does the Minister think that it was the intention of Parliament when it introduced the 35-hour rule that somebody such as Mrs. Morris, who cannot, because of her circumstances, get employment—even if there were any in my constituency, where it is very thin on the ground anyway—should look after people as severely disabled as Simon, and get other state allowances for doing so, for up to 66 hours a week, which is far beyond the 35-hour test for ICA, and not get this payment? Is the Minister telling me that there is no way, through an appeal or through discretion, to get over this? Is there no flexibility at all about this cut-off at midnight? Does the Minister say that that is the case and that there is no flexibility or likelihood of flexibility with regard to Simon Morris?

Miss Widdecombe: I must stress again that invalid care allowance is not an allowance as payment for caring services. It does not compensate people for caring. It is specifically aimed at compensating people for inability to take full employment. There are people outside the categories who are suggesting—people studying, people who perhaps are already over pension age, and other people—who are not available for employment and who might well be providing that level of care, and they are not eligible.

Certainly it is not the intention of Parliament to deprive people of this allowance where they qualify. It is not a payment for caring services. The question is not how many hours people care but whether they are prevented from taking up full-time employment. The 35 hours a week is the guideline and the definition of that point.

I know that the watershed midway through the weekend, about which the hon. Gentleman complains, is unfair to Mrs. Morris, and may indeed seem to be unfair, but the purpose of ICA, as I have said several times, is to replace the earnings income of a person who forgoes the opportunity of work in order to care. In that context, the present provision is in line with what for most people is the working week, which is usually Monday to Friday.

Since ICA is to help those who have forgone full-time work by providing substantial and regular care rather than a payment for caring, the present test is not, in my view, unfair. Where the disabled person returns home every or almost every weekend, the total hours of care in any week will generally add up to 35. So carers performing their role regularly but not necessarily every day can be entitled. Where the weekends or holidays at home are intermittent, as in Mrs. Morris's case, the test of regular and substantial care may not be met.

The extent of Mrs. Morris's attention to her son's needs during the hours that he is at home is not at issue. Nevertheless, I do not feel that it is feasible to change the rules to meet her particular circumstances. As I have said, to use a different day would simply mean that we eliminate other people who benefit from the arrangement. There are very likely to be other examples of regular patterns of caring in which ICA is payable at present that would suffer from such a change. It would also remove a common link with other social security benefits.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman may be asking himself whether we have done anything to gauge the extent of the effect of the rule. As I explained, we estimate that decisions that go against the claimant number only a hundred or so in a year, whereas, at present, there are 130,000 recipients of ICA. The extent of the problem identified by the hon. Gentleman would not appear to be great.

In summary, I do not feel that we can change the rules to meet a particular case. The test that we have laid down is consistent with social security benefits, consistent with what most people regard as the start and end of the week, and consistent with our aim of trying to compensate people who forgo full-time employment. It is not a payment for caring services. It is not to compensate somebody for caring. It is specifically aimed at earnings potential. We have devised a fair method. Even the fairest method will throw up anomalies and exceptions. Could I do so, I would not propose to change that method this week or in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 February 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

National Health Service (Compensation) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I feel privileged to be able to introduce a Bill which will spare thousands of people unnecessary distress, uncertainty and, often, bitterness. My proposals are fair, just and reasonable. As a civilised society, we have a responsibility for each other. In providing the invaluable services of the national health service, we must ensure that the highest standards are observed and that the quality of care is carefully maintained and monitored. It is our national health service and it owes us a duty of care. We should not accept anything less than the best.

We place our trust in doctors in the health service. It is an ethos that has been fostered and encouraged. To shy away from the consequences of medical accidents would be to undermine and to betray that trust. Most people are thankful for and satisfied with the care that they receive from the national health service, but a few have unfortunate or even tragic experiences. The Bill is intended to help that minority.

I used the words "unfortunate or even tragic" with care, because it is important to establish straightaway that I am not proposing compensation for every minor incident, thus creating a system that would soon become bogged down under myriad trivial complaints. I felt that it was right to restrict compensation to those whose lives have been seriously adversely affected by medical accident—not, of course, excluding anyone who is currently eligible for compensation under the present legal system.

The Bill provides that people injured, distressed or subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering during care by the national health service may be awarded compensation. Injury is defined as the result of a mishap in NHS care and not as the foreseeable and reasonable result of that care or of the person's pre-existing condition. The Bill also covers patients who, as a result of injury, die, require hospital treatment for 10 days or more, are prevented from engaging in normal activities for more than 28 days, suffer significant pain, disability, harm, distress or significant loss of amenity, or suffer from a reduction in life expectancy.

I propose a medical injuries compensation board which, with the approval of the Secretary of State, will lay down a code of guidance establishing criteria by which it will determine whether a mishap has occurred during NHS care. The hurdles are rightly high and include death, lengthy hospitalisation, being unable to work or to pursue one's normal life for a period of a month or more and unnecessary pain and distress, which are, as I said, eligible for compensation under the present system. Amounts offered would take into account the severity and duration of the suffering. If a full recovery is made, the award would reflect that.

Some people receive compensation at present. I know that the Government believe that the current system is reasonable and, with modifications, can be made acceptable. I dispute that wholeheartedly. The current system is a lottery and it is necessary to prove negligence to be awarded compensation. There may be negligence, but proving it can be distressing, costly and time consuming—and quite often impossible. The only witness may be unconscious at the time of the incident, unaware of what is being done and why. Finding out exactly what happened, who made what decision, what might have been done instead and who took what action is often virtually impossible. Even if the patient is not unconscious, he is often far from at his best and most alert; he may be alone, in pain and frightened, and is probably undressed. Those are hardly the best circumstances in which to be impartial and to take careful note of what is going on around one, so that the necessary evidence can subsequently be produced in a court of law.

The miseries involved in proving negligence were graphically described by a woman who discussed her plight in a number of recent television interviews. Her husband died some seven years ago, as a result of what she believed to be negligence following a fairly routine and relatively minor piece of surgery. She was left a young widow, with three children. She took the matter to court, and was eventually awarded £250,000 in compensation —although she made it clear that it was not the money, but a proper investigation and explanation, in which she was interested.

The matter did not end there, however. The health authority chose to appeal and, seven years after her husband's death, the woman discovered that she had lost her £250,000 award; even worse, costs of £150,000 were awarded against her. The only way in which she can meet those costs is by selling her house.

Any civilised society would recognise that what happened to that young woman and her family is a tragedy —and we have made matters not better, but considerably worse. In many ways, the most damning aspect of the incident is what those seven years have done: they have melted into a sea of bitterness and legal wrangles. A speedy and just settlement of the woman's case would perhaps have enabled her to come to terms with her loss and to start to rebuild her life and those of her children; instead, she is embittered and obsessed by the whole experience.

I have noticed that, in the many cases that have been brought to my attention, the misery caused by prolonged and uncertain court proceedings often matches, and in some instances even outweighs, the effect of the original tragedy. A study of claims made against one English district health authority between 1984 and 1987 found that, on average, abandoned-claim cases lasted between one and three years, settled cases two years and defended cases four to seven years. We are talking about years of prolonging the agony.

We should bear it in mind that the worst cases are always settled out of court. Those who say that the current

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legal system brings important matters to light, introduces an element of human justice and brings negligence to the forefront of the public's attention are misleading themselves. Only the more controversial cases reach the court; severe cases of reprehensible behaviour and negligence are settled quickly and quietly and we, the public, hear nothing. I dispute the adequacy of the legal system in cases of medical negligence, because the die is loaded so heavily against the patient. Right may not always be done; in fact, I believe that it is rarely done.

Let me go a stage further. My second reason for challenging the legal system is that—apart from the delay and the cost involved in proving negligence where it exists—there will inevitably be genuine accidents in an organisation as large as the national health service. Things go wrong as a result of a variety of decisions made by many people and may culminate in a tragic outcome which is no one person's fault.

The philosophy behind my Bill accepts that a degree of human error and human frailty is inevitable and understandable. We all make mistakes, but most of those mistakes will not adversely affect the rest of someone's life so dramatically. We are asking our doctors and nurses—our medical practitioners—to shoulder that burden and we should recognise it.

I do not intend the Bill to be in any way punitive towards practitioners or staff. In a humane and civilised society, however, we should be prepared to make amends when something goes wrong that is no one's fault, or no fault can be proved, or we do not wish to pin the fault on a respected and trusted practitioner. Let me give an example. Three young brothers are admitted to an emergency and casualty department. The doctor in charge must make immediate decisions. He perceives that two of the young men are critically injured, while the third appears not to be so badly hurt. He attends immediately to the first two and saves their lives. But he has omitted to notice that what he put down to a whiplash injury in the case of the third brother is, in fact, a broken neck. As a result of his failure to stabilise the neck, the third brother's spinal cord is severed and he becomes paraplegic.

What are the family to do? Are they to take to court, on grounds of negligence, the doctor who has saved two of their sons and whose judgments and actions no one could have challenged? The relationship between doctor and patient has sometimes been carefully fostered and a patient who has been on the receiving end of one mistake may not wish to bring the doctor to his knees. A confrontational and adversarial approach does nothing to sustain the vital doctor-patient relationship.

My Bill provides for what I judge to be appropriate levels of accountability. While I emphasise again that I have no intention of instigating a witch hunt, when reprehensible behaviour or repeated mistakes by one practitioner come to the attention of the compensation board, it will surely be inappropriate for the board simply to pay up, say nothing and wait for the next case. I suggest that the board be empowered to refer the matter to the appropriate authority—be it the professional body to which the practitioner belongs, the health authority or, in the most extreme cases, the Director of Public Prosecutions. Let me stress that I would expect that power to be used only in the event of reprehensible behaviour or repeated acts of negligence.

The Bill allows for compensation to be paid without evidence of negligence, although there must, of course, be evidence that the injury was caused by national health service treatment—or lack of it—and was not a result of inevitable progression of a disease, a known and disclosed side-effect of a drug or treatment, an agreed risk or some other cause.

I find it extraordinary that my Bill has been attacked for allowing the problem of causation to remain. In what circumstances does the state provide money without demanding evidence that the appropriate criteria have been met? The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board must establish that a criminal injury has occurred and that someone did not simply fall down stairs. When unemployment benefit is paid, the authorities go to great lengths to ensure that the recipient is genuinely available for work and is not simply sponging. All social security benefits are carefully vetted. It is quite within the medical injury compensation board's ability and remit to take sensible decisions about mistakes that were caused by NHS treatment and to differentiate between those and mishaps that have nothing to do with the service.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Lady is making an important point and it would be wrong to attack her Bill on the causation issue in that way. However, what troubles some of us, and particularly legal practitioners in the area, is that, because the hon. Lady has sensibly restricted the kind of cases that can qualify for compensation, there are bound to be matters of causation that will concern the board. In other words, the board will have to decide whether particular cases fit in with its criteria. There will be quasi-litigation around the margins to decide whether people qualify for compensation. The problem of proving negligence will be removed, but causation problems will then arise in respect of whether a particular case fits the criteria. The only way in which the hon. Lady can solve that problem is to have compensation across the board without any criteria, and that would be prohibitively expensive.

Mrs. Barnes: I do not accept that argument. It has never been my intention to have an across-the-board compensation scheme, on the lines of the scheme in New Zealand, for all accidents. My Bill is about accidents and mishaps in the NHS. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I want to make progress because I intend to cover in more detail the point that he has raised, which I believe is very important.

No one can challenge the fact that I have reduced the hurdles that must be crossed. Instead of having to prove negligence and causation, there is simply an obligation to establish causation. That is perfectly within the powers of the board.

Of course, there are inherent problems in establishing causation. Many cases will be quite straightforward, but none will perhaps cause quite so much heartache and soul searching as those caused by cerebral palsy. In a recent address to the Royal College of Midwives, the chief medical officer said that the upward trend of lawsuits against obstetricians for cases of cerebral palsy is both unjustifiable in the face of present medical evidence and unacceptable in terms of its potential consequence to the

quality of care available for pregnant women. In 1983, 50 legal cases were brought claiming medical negligence in cases of cerebral palsy. By 1989 there were 200 and it seems that the final figure for 1990 will be nearly 600—and that out of approximately 1,500 cases of cerebral palsy a year. It may not be long before all those cases come to court. With or without my Bill, that matter must be addressed seriously.

The levels of award are also soaring.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): How would the Bill treat the victims of cerebral palsy? There may be 1,500 such cases every year, but it is uncertain how many of those result from NHS treatment and how many occur during pregnancy. How would that be resolved? Would they all receive compensation under the terms of the Bill?

Mrs. Barnes: I shall deal with that in a moment.

There is growing evidence and consensus in medical opinion and research that very few cases of cerebral palsy are caused by the birth process. There seems to be a conviction stemming from papers that were written during the last century that asphyxiation during the birth process is the cause of cerebral palsy. However, that view is now widely and legitimately challenged.

The needs of those tragic children in many cases would not be met by my Bill. Some of the aspects of the problems created by decisions taken by midwives and obstetricians while attending to the births of some children when they may have an eye as to what might happen in a future court of law rather than be considering what is best for the mother and child would certainly be addressed by the Bill. The Bill would allow the board to decide that cerebral palsy was caused by the birth process if that could be demonstrated, but it would not have to attribute negligence or fault to the practitioner. That is what must happen at the moment.

At present is is not just a matter of establishing that cerebral palsy occurred at birth. It is a matter of establishing that someone was at fault. Even if it occurred at birth, that birth might have been properly handled by the midwife or obstetrician in charge. The Bill would remove one major anxiety—defensive medicine—which particularly threatens our maternity services.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The hon. Lady is referring to children who suffer from cerebral palsy or other kinds of brain damage. I am president of my local Mencap organisation. Enormous problems would be caused for parents of mentally handicapped children, especially those who are profoundly mentally handicapped, if some were to scoop the pool because they could establish that their children suffered because of a mishap within the definition of the Bill while other parents could not prove that. How will the hon. Lady overcome that problem? The hon. Lady's proposal seems almost to replace one lottery with another.

Mrs. Barnes: Mencap firmly and completely supports my Bill. It accepts that there are instances when mental handicap may be caused by the birth process or as a result of other medical injury for which compensation should be paid. Mencap is also aware that in other cases that might not apply.

My Bill will redress the difference in some respects. I will consider those points in a moment. However, my Bill is not intended to compensate according to need all those with an inherited or congenital disease. I am honest about that, but I am also sad about it.

I should like a system of generous benefit based on need and everyone in the House would favour that if it were possible. However, I have not tried to change the world with one Bill. I have tried to tackle the problem of NHS accidents that cause harm to patients and I do not apologise for those limitations. I had to set the boundaries and I knew that there would be tragedies. I considered the possibility because, as a human being I was tempted, as I am sure many judges are, to say, "What if we told the board 'nod and a wink, let all the cerebral palsy cases have compensation'?" However, only 8 or 13 per cent. of those cases may have been caused at birth. And what about the deaf children? What about the blind children? What about the spina bifida children?

The Bill is about accidents and mishaps caused by the NHS. While I regret that it does not allay every kind of human misery, I make no apologies for sticking to the main thrust of the principle.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): This is a crucial issue. A young friend of mine suffers from cerebral palsy and I do not know, and the hon. Lady does not know, whether it is congenital or it happened at birth. The Royal School for Deaf Children is in my constituency and it deals with kids who suffer from deafness and other unfortunate multiple handicaps. In many cases no one knows why or how those children came to suffer as they do. Will not the hon. Lady's process simply create a desperate scramble after birth to jump on to a bandwagon? Will she really solve the problem?

Mrs. Barnes: Perhaps one of the main disservices done to children with cerebral palsy is the conviction that has pertained for many years that the condition is due to asphyxiation during the birth process. If the medical experts are right and that is not the case, the current legal scramble has inhibited what is really needed, which is research into the cause of cerebral palsy, establishing much earlier in a pregnancy when it is present and addressing that issue in the same way as many others have been addressed.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): The present system has not inhibited research into the causes of cerebral palsy. I am glad to tell the hon. Lady about the Little Foundation, which was launched last November and of which I have the honour to be a trustee, whose whole basis of existence is to examine the formation of the brain pre-conceptually and post-conceptually, because it is thought that that will be the way forward to understanding the causes of cerebral palsy.

I am enormously concerned. I deal a lot with handicapped children. As I shall say later, if I am fortunate enough to catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye, the Bill will create extraordinary misery for somebody who falls on one side of the Bill and a handicapped child who falls on the other side. As the hon. Lady correctly said, medical knowledge is not perfect. One minute we know one thing, and another minute research shows that a medical matter is due to something else.

Mrs. Barnes: I do not wish to trade credentials for the care of and concern about handicapped children. The Bill is not about handicapped children. That is not a

[Mrs. Barnes]

shortcoming in the Bill. It is a shortcoming in our society, perhaps, that we are not sufficiently generous to some of those unfortunate people. The Bill is about mishaps or accidents that are caused by the NHS when a patient who puts himself into the hands of the NHS, rightly expecting and, let us remember, having paid for the best, does not get it. Something goes dreadfully wrong and we leave them worse off. That is what the Bill is about.

I accept—indeed, it is my intention—that more people will be allowed through the net. In addition to those who experience and can prove negligence, my Bill will cover people who experienced negligence but could not prove it and people who experienced a genuine accident that was nobody's fault.

However, I challenge the assertion that the proposals will attract infinitely more cases than would be just. With or without the Bill, the number of claims will rise. It is widely acknowledged that the frequency and number of medical negligence claims has risen markedly over recent years. The Medical Protection Society and the Medical Defence Union have produced figures showing that claims have at least doubled. However, a major further boost to claims is about to happen. As from 1 November, patients will have access to all their medical records, the handwritten ones as well as the computerised ones to which they already have access. We all know that gaining access to medical records has been a major barrier to initiating a claim in the past. That will change.

We have only to examine what has happened in the United States to know that, for a variety of reasons, people are demanding more and expecting better and that the consumer society and consumer associations are fostering expectations. I challenge the Government to commit themselves, in deeds as well as words, to the rights and demands of consumers.

Again, I emphasise that I am not offering a soft option for anyone wishing to exploit the system. My attention has been drawn to some ludicrous examples of what happens in New Zealand. For instance, when a prisoner tries to escape, falls and breaks his leg, he is entitled to compensation. Theirs is a general scheme including car crashes and sports injuries. Indeed, there is evidence that the New Zealand system has worked poorly for the victims of medical negligence.

My scheme is confined to the national health service. After all, the national health service accounts for a huge proportion of our national expenditure—nearly 15 per cent., or £27 billion this year if yesterday's Library figures are accepted. We have a duty to ensure that that money is properly spent and that standards are safeguarded.

Also, if serious mistakes are made or if accidents occur, we cannot simply wash our hands of the matter and say, "Tough luck. You put yourelves in the hands of the NHS. The staff did their best, but they inadvertently made matters much worse. It was nobody's fault. You are on your own; there is nothing that we can do about it." That is what the debate about the haemophiliacs was about. It is now academic whether there was negligence by the NHS. We all know that imported blood products were used some time after the possible dangers of those products were known. There is no question that anyone intended haemophiliacs to be infected with the HIV virus with all its horrific consequences. A blood-clotting agent, which for many years made their lives infinitely more tolerable, was found to be the carrier of an even more virulent disease. Something went terribly wrong.

Those who were greatly disadvantaged by the miseries of haemophilia were dealt a cruel blow. We as a society sat wringing our hands watching the tortuous legal proceedings while they died. It is to the Government's credit and to that of the new leadership that they brought that appalling situation to an end with a financial offer. What was that if not no-fault compensation? It was a recognition of intolerable circumstances that were brought about by the well-intentioned actions of our national health service. It was a response to the public clamour for justice and recompense. It was a long-overdue gesture to put an end to the obscene sight of those hapless victims struggling on through the courts knowing that, before verdicts, appeals and counter-appeals were reached, many of them would be dead. They would have died, as many did, not knowing what provision, if any, was made for their families.

I was invited to appear on a Channel 4 "Comment" programme some months ago and I chose the subject of the haemophiliacs. While I was researching that subject, one thing struck me very forcefully. We all hear of the haemophiliacs, the Thalidomide victims and the Opren victims. It is hard to say that anyone has an advantage if they have been on the receiving end of such a tragedy, but one benefit that they have is that there are enough of them to form pressure groups to maintain media attention and to keep in the newspaper headlines until the public clamour for action is heeded. However, what about all the one-off cases about which we never hear anything? They are perhaps reported once in a local newspaper and then they are forgotten—they are on their own.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Is not there also the further point, which the hon. Lady might deploy in defence of her Bill, that if, as at the moment, one or two cases occur in a certain health authority area, with considerable necessary outlay by that health authority, it could be to the disadvantage of patients who are served in that area, whereas another area that may be fortunate enough not to have had such a series of claims is able to direct its finances to where they were intended to be spent —on patient care?

Mrs. Barnes: That is a fair point and I shall refer to it in a few moments.

When the next tragedy strikes—and strike it will; the House will have to deal with it and may regret the decision not to support my Bill—on behalf of the haemophiliacs and the Thalidomide and Opren victims and, perhaps, more important, all those cases that we will never know about, we must effect a fairer, speedier and more suitably generous system than the courts. Hence my proposal to establish a medical injury compensation board to define eligibility for compensation, make the necessary assessments and make payments speedily and fairly, ending the bitterness and uncertainty of the current system.

I have not suggested that people should be denied access to the courts. That would impinge on their constitutional rights. The Bill proposes that all claims for compensation should be directed to the board first and should be made within six months of the claimant's becoming aware of the relationship between his or her injury and NHS care. The Bill says that the board should

notify the claimant of the result of its investigation within three months of receiving the claim or, where that is not practicable, at the earliest opportunity. The reason why I have kept the timing tight is that, in order to find out what happened, it is important that the investigation is carried out as soon as possible after the injury occurs. Of course, that will not always be possible, but we hear too often of investigations that could have been made much earlier being carried out after doctors and nurses have dispersed to various parts of the world and no one can get to the bottom of the matter.

The board would have a variety of options open to it, including giving an explanation and, where appropriate, an apology, as well as compensation, of course. It could refer any serious matters on to other bodies for further consideration.

Mr. Favell: I had better confess that I am a lawyer. Clearly, an enormous number of cases will be referred to the board. Any right hon. and hon. Members will know from their surgeries that people regularly come and say, "Auntie Flo has died in odd circumstances. Would you have a look at it?" When people lose a loved one, they look around to find a reason for the person's death. I have experienced that myself. How will the supposed victim or the family be sure that the board will go through the procedures properly? It is a great tragedy when anyone dies. In the law courts at least people can see what is going on. Will the board operate behind closed doors? Will lawyers be involved? If so, shall not we return to the position that we are now in?

Mrs. Barnes: There are possibilities for appeals and judicial reviews. Once established, the board, like many other similar bodies, will achieve a proper professional code of conduct and will be respected. It will complete the necessary investigations properly.

It is important to stress that many organisations to which I have spoken who represent the patients' or consumers' view feel strongly that explanations and, where appropriate, apologies are as important as, if not more important than, financial compensation. If a child's life is lost as a result of a medical mishap, it is virtually impossible to put a price on that loss. In monetary terms, nothing will alleviate the misery. The only constructive outcome is a proper explanation of what went wrong and some reassurance that lessons have been learnt and that, as a result of that tradegy, it is less likely that someone else will experience the same misery. Therefore, it is important to ensure that explanations are given and people have the answers to the questions that so often drive them to the courts. So many people say—it is not a cynical statement —"I did not take this matter to the courts for the money but to get to the bottom of it."

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Barnes: No, I must press on.

After the loss of a loved one, finding out exactly what happened is not only a dominant force within a person but becomes a right. With a proper answer at an early stage, much of the bitterness and the punitive approach that we see in the courts will evaporate.

Patients will have two months to decide whether to accept the offer. If they accept, any legal claim that they may have will fall and become the property of the board. If they reject the offer, they will, of course, be free to pursue the matter through the courts independently, with all the risks and uncertainty that that involves.

I believe that if the scheme is properly funded it will satisfy all but the most litigious. If it is not adequately funded there will be obvious and inherent problems. The fundamental problem will be that all the claims that did not have a chance in the courts will take the board route and the others will go via the courts as usual. I recognise that that will be an inherent problem unless the funding is right. I shall address the matter of funding in a little more detail in a moment.

I have included measures to help to control the level of the board's income and expenditure. I am all too aware of the genuine fear of escalating and uncontrollable costs. I sincerely believe that that is a misplaced fear. I have included the power for the Secretary of State to control the level of the board's expenditure. If he feels it appropriate to fix the amount at the current level of expenditure on administering, litigating and compensating current claims, he has that right. Some would argue that the Bill gives the Secretary of State too many powers, but I judged it necessary to allay his and the Government's fears that the system could run amok and out of control.

It is important to remind ourselves of how the money is currently spent. It is conservatively estimated that under the current system almost half the money spent on compensating, administering and paying legal costs goes on legal and administrative costs. More recent evidence shows that the breakdown may be even less favourably inclined towards the patient and that perhaps as much as two thirds of the costs go on lawyers and administrators. My Bill would enable that money to be directed, at a stroke, to patients, which is where it should be spent.

Another financial aspect that my Bill addresses is the provision in the Law Reform (Personal Injuries) Act 1948 that the availability of national health service care shall be ignored when awarding compensation for personal injuries. In practice that means that when a judge is calculating an appropriate level of compensation, he or she cannot take into account any provision made by the NHS for on-going medical needs, even though NHS care may be the best available and what the patient wants. For example, a patient with a spinal injury caused as a result of a medical mishap may feel that the best place for him is in Stoke Mandeville where he will receive national health service treatment and he will go there, but a judge making an award is not allowed to include that in his calculation. He must calculate all medical costs at private levels and there is no obligation on the patient to avail himself of private care. Indeed, many do not.

Often, compensation is a windfall for relatives. That clause of an Act passed when the NHS was in its infancy and many remained suspicious of it has caused some of the headline-grabbing figures that we see in the newspapers nowadays. The measure is inappropriate in this day and age. High-quality NHS care should be included as an in-kind element of compensation. To return briefly to the argument about cerebral palsy children, such a measure would reduce at a stroke a great deal of the disparity between children who receive awards and those who do not. A large part of the awards made at present is based on on-going medical care for the rest of the patient's life at private levels, when many do not need private care because the state makes adequate provision.

[Mrs. Barnes]

The board will also be in a position to settle any claims involving a third-party supplier of goods to the health service. That will particularly affect suppliers of drugs. Again, that frees the claimant from lengthy and uncertain court proceedings. Only yesterday we heard that some Opren victims are to be denied compensation because the time for claims has run out. However, the board would be able to pursue any legal claim that has arisen from a case, so if there is another Thalidomide or Opren tragedy the board could, where appropriate, award compensation and then take the pharmaceutical company to the courts itself. That will take away the misery caused to individuals in the present unacceptable situation.

For that reason a number of pharmaceutical companies and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society have expressed enthusiasm for my Bill. They are only too aware of the adverse effects of the publicity that some cases have brougnt to their door. They recongise that the current situation is, not to put too fine a point on it, a mess. They also recognise the advantages of dealing with one board rather than tens, hundreds or thousands of individual cases.

The Bill will also allow for periodic payment of compensation. At present, a judge is in the impossible position of having to decide how long someone will live. In the event that someone dies much earlier than expected the compensation is simply a windfall to relatives. Conversely, as a result of medical development, a child who is not expected to live beyond its teens may live to 40 or 50. The parents of that child must continue to cope long after the money has run out.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): The hon. Lady has said that her Bill is supported by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and by some pharmaceutical companies. Would she care to name one or two of those companies, as that may be helpful?

Mrs. Barnes: Eli Lilly has written to express support for the Bill, as have a number of others. I should be happy to give the hon. Gentleman a list of them.

The Bill will seek to ensure that NHS patients have the same benefits as private patients by applying the terms of the Sale of Goods Act 1979 to all goods supplied through the NHS. I have examined the specific financial aspects connected with the Bill and I am of the firmest opinion that, in the long run, the scheme will be virtually self-financing.

We must remember that medical error does not have a cost implication only for the victim. The NHS is already having to bear the cost of mistakes that have been made. Those mistakes can be extremely costly in terms of the emergency treatment that may be necessary following avoidable complications as well as in terms of additional surgery and the occupation of a bed, which will mean the postponement of other patient admissions. In some cases such mistakes require the facilities of intensive-care units. The cost of such mistakes is, at present, unidentified, but it should be brought to the attention of NHS managers, along with the current total cost of negligence litigation, which possibly amounts to £100 million.

At present there are no reliable figures on the aggregate expenditure on compensation and related legal, administrative and professional costs. Careful research undertaken in 1988 suggested that that cost was about £75 million. Given the increased number of cases and the level of awards since then, it is not unreasonable to suggest that that cost is now £100 million.

I have researched the issue of costs thoroughly, but reliable information is scarce. I suspect, however, that the hidden cost of subsequent NHS care following negligence, including those cases that never come to light, combined with the direct costs of compensating, may put a new perspective on the desirability of a medical injury compensation board.

The BMA has suggested that the likely cost of establishing that board would be £100 million—the Secretary of State has suggested that the cost might be slightly higher—but that cost would account for only 0·37 per cent. of the £27 billion that we spend on the NHS. We should also remember that in 1986-87 the cost of the privatisation of British Gas was £162 million—those costs were incurred in just one year.

We should regard the board as a quality-control measure, rather than as a charter for incompetence, as some have suggested. If the board were able to publish reports and research programmes it could make an additional contribution to cost effectiveness in the NHS. Such information would certainly help to raise standards of care and management that would benefit the victims of negligence, other patients and the nation.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) drew attention to the anxiety now felt by health authorities as a result of the introduction of the Crown indemnity scheme. There is little in the current system to deter negligence, which, according to its proponents, is one of its main advantages. The Crown indemnity scheme means that all direct financial liability is met by the health authority and is not passed on, either in part or whole, to the individual concerned.

We should not ignore the dilemma that will be faced by health authorities in the coming years. South Western regional health authority, for example, has estimated that medical negligence cases now in the pipeline could cost £20 million in the next four years. There are major doubts about regional health authorities' ability to cope with that. Patient care will inevitably be affected. The unpredictable nature of such costs make planning almost impossible.

Sir Robert McCrindle: It might help the hon. Lady to know that the BMA has suggested that, by 1996, under the present scheme it is estimated that no less than 13 per cent. of total resources available to the average health authority may go towards paying compensation for negligence claims.

Mrs. Barnes: That is a valuable point.

I am aware that many other hon. Members want to participate and I know that I have gone on longer than I intended, partly because of the number of interventions I have taken.

I pay tribute to the many individuals and organisations that have provided support and help towards the Bill. I put on record my thanks to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) for her earlier work on the subject and her support throughout the Bill's development. I also thank its sponsors from both sides of the House. I could not let this opportunity go by, however, without paying particular

tribute to the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), whom we are so pleased to see in the Chamber today.

I also pay tribute to the contributions made by the National Consumer Council, the Law Society and the BMA. I am grateful for the detailed work that was undertaken by the Royal College of Physicians—many of my proposals arise from, or are supported by, its work. I am also grateful for the research provided by the Institute of Socio-Legal Studies at Oxford university and the King's Fund.

I remind the House that the Bill has had the overwhelming support of a vast number of professional and voluntary organisations. I have received support from the General Council of the Bar, the Royal Colleges of Physicians, of Midwives, of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, of Psychiatrists and of Nursing. I have received support from the Patients Association, the Haemaophilia Society, Mencap, the National Confederation of Consumer Groups and the Thalidomide Society, to name but a few.

I commend the Bill to the House for further serious consideration.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. More than 20 hon. Members want to speak, so I hope that those who are fortunate enough to be called will make brief speeches.

10.28 am

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): I thank the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) for the depth of her work on the Bill. It is not often that we get a private Member's Bill that is backed by such research.

I also thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I recognise that he is unlikely to support the Bill, but the way in which he has deployed the argument about the problems connected with it have made those of us interested in the Bill think long and hard about it and, therefore, to make a conscious decision on its merits.

We all know that there are patients who are adversely affected by negligence, and through no fault of any party. I shall concentrate my remarks on no-fault cases. I recognise that the negligence dimension is essentially a category for the law and for tort. I therefore welcome the proposals that I hear are to be brought forward to speed up negligence claims and I shall listen with interest to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has to say about them. Such changes, if they take place, will be greatly welcomed.

I suspect that most of us have reread the Pearson commission report, in particular that rather damning paragraph which describes the tort system as

"too costly, too cumbersome, too prone to delay, too capricious in its operation to be defensible."

I also suspect that no hon. Member would like to copy the American system under which lawyers go trailing behind the ambulance.

No fault arises because medicine is an inexact science and the human body is one of the most complex of organisms. Medicine often operates on the frontiers and we do not exactly know what its results will be. And occasionally, as the hon. Member for Greenwich said, accidents just happen.

One reason why the Bill has attracted support is that it is all very well for those who take their cases to court to be paid compensation of £500,000, £750,000 or £1·2 million, but the haemophiliac case was a prime example of the fact that sums of that size are often not needed to alleviate distress and to rectify problems associated with restrictions on lifestyle. Often £50,000 will go a long way to helping people who have suffered through no one's fault.

I declare an interest in respect of one area of the Bill. I advise two pharmaceutical companies—Upjohn and Reckitt and Colman. I have a slight reservation about this part of the measure. These pharmaceutical products are properly researched, tested and checked under all the mechanisms that we have established in this country. They are properly marketed and used for the purposes for which they are prescribed. We are now part of Europe, not merely an independent country. The House sends me to the Council of Europe, where I sit on the health committee. About six months ago I proposed a motion, with the support of a majority of the countries in the Council of Europe, proposing that the health committee look into a no-fault compensation scheme for drugs and appliances. The motion has now gone to the health committee for consideration.

The Secretary of State rightly makes the point that it is doubtful whether the public sector should pay for problems that arise, albeit through no one's fault, in the private sector. Some hon. Members who are present this morning will remember when we brought in the air travel reserve fund. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) was much involved in it. It works well because it is based on a levy paid by everyone who takes a package holiday. If someone is stranded abroad the fund is used to bring him home again. The health committee of the Council of Europe—the idea has received some support from the pharmaceutical industry —is looking into the possibility of devising a tiny levy on every scrip in order to create a fund from which payments in no-fault cases could be made.

Although I understand the Bill and broadly support its intentions, I wonder whether enough work has been done in the area that I have discussed, bearing in mind the Secretary of State's anxiety about financing this exercise. I believe that we should allow the Council of Europe to do its work alongside this Bill.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Like my hon. Friend I broadly support the hon. Lady's aims, but I have some reservations about the part of the Bill that relates to the use of drugs. Is not there a danger that, if we pass the Bill, it may become attractive to use proprietary drugs? Although that might suit the two companies with which my hon. Friend is associated, it could also lead to increased expenditure in the health service; whereas it is generally known that generic drugs are perfectly acceptable for treating many maladies.

Mr. Morris: I am not sure whether I agree. There are slight dangers with some products that are not necessarily generic but are imported from third world countries. There have been claims in cases associated with them, too. I merely suggest that this subject needs to be dealt with and I question whether it should be dealt with in this Bill.

A new federal law has been passed in the United States covering life-saving appliances and the need to ensure that if something goes wrong with a heart valve the company involved will contact the patient through the medical

[Mr. Morris]

profession and warn him that there is a problem. If the Secretary of State catches the Chair's eye later perhaps he will tell us whether the same applies here.

The Council of Europe is doing some work on drugs and appliances. It is an area which is not central to the Bill. I hope that it will be given a Second Reading, but that this area will be dropped so that the hon. Member for Greenwich can concentrate on the Bill's key element—no fault—and return to us when more work has been done on drugs and appliances.

10.38 am

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I disagreed with a great deal of what the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) said, but I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who has produced a valuable and comprehensive piece of social legislation. If the Secretary of State opposes the Bill that will be disgraceful. This Bill will be a model for legislation that the House will pass in the future. We are not prepared to tolerate this shocking system of gross injustice to many victims. I am very sorry to hear on the grapevine that the Secretary of State intends to oppose the Bill. No sane person can defend the present lottery: fortunes for the few and nothing for the vast majority. It is a shocking and disgraceful system imposing stress, anxiety and injustice.

Under the present system, the multinationals and large organisations almost always win cases against individuals. That is also intolerable. Some of these organisations are —frankly—crooked; they hedge, fudge and even lie in defence of their interests. I campaigned on these issues before the hon. Member for Greenwich and my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) became Members of Parliament. I have a great deal of experience of these organisations. Some are honest and straightforward and act legitimately but others are unscrupulous. The individual suffers as a consequence of the tactics that they employ.

The House of Commons cannot accept the existing system. It must be changed. The Bill provides a splendid opportunity to change it. If the Government oppose the Bill—I wait to hear what the Secretary of State has to say —it will suggest that they are in alliance with the multinationals to deny justice to individuals who are suffering.

I noted what the hon. Member for Northampton, South said about drugs, but I particularly welcome the inclusion in the Bill of a provision relating to the victims of drug disasters. The British Medical Association's opposition to the provision, on the ground that it is too complex, is nonsensical. I do not believe that the BMA understands how essential this provision is. It is vital because of the absurdity that private patients occupy a privileged position compared with national health service patients. The Bill would put an end to that. The provision is also vital because alleged drug disasters are common and widespread. I do not want to blow my own trumpet, but over the years I have been involved in many of these issues and I am glad that the hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) is here. He and I worked closely together many years ago on Thalidomide. He did wonderful work for Thalidomide children. We dealt with complex issues that cause great anguish. However, the hon. Gentleman may have reservations about the Bill, which we may hear about later in the debate. I have also worked on Opren, vaccine damage, tranquillisers and Debendox and in each case the individual suffered because of the existing system. It is the system which is at fault. I blame the multinational companies in many cases, but they say that they are the victims of the system. Therefore, it is the Government's responsibility to change that system. This Bill provides them with the opportunity to do so.

An important concomitant of the Bill is that it would change the attitude of all Secretaries of State for Health. All too often in the past Secretaries of State for Health have shown a lofty disdain for drug-damaged people. Throughout all the campaigns we have heard formal expressions of sympathy and a disclaimer of interest and involvement. The usual formula is for previous Secretaries of State to say, "It's not our fault, we are not responsible. We sympathise, but it's just too bad." The Bill will put pressure on future Secretaries of State in appropriate cases to sue the drug companies and recoup the money paid to them.

That would certainly cure complacency. The Secretary of State would be transformed into the protector of the consumer instead of being the guardian of the drugs industry, the role which he has filled far too often. It would be a long-awaited transformation. Who knows—the Secretary of State may even end up studying the vital need for tighter regulation of the drug industry's irresponsible marketing and testing practices. Those who have dealt with the subject know how poor some of those practices are. Every patient wants prevention, not compensation.

I understand that the Association of Victims of Medical Accidents does not support the Bill. I deeply regret that. The association, and Arnold Simanowitz who leads it, have done wonderful work for patients, but they fear that the Bill gives a blank cheque to the proposed board which would produce the code of guidance. However, I should prefer a blank cheque for the board—particularly as its proposals would have to be endorsed by Parliament and could be modified by Parliament—rather than expensive cheques for lawyers and frustration for victims, as now.

The association's other major objection relates to the provision of information and accountability. It is right that the association should be concerned about these matters. People are entitled to know how and why personal disasters happen, in addition to seeking compensation. However, the Bill provides a mechanism that would directly increase the provision of information. That should allay the association's anxiety. I hope that Mr. Simanowitz will change his mind.

Equally important is the need to diminish the adversarial system. The hon. Member for Greenwich explained how the Bill would lead to a diminution of the adversarial system. In the past, the medical profession has tended to close ranks to try to defend colleagues. That is fine in the army and in universities and colleges. I have done that myself. We all defend colleagues out of a common sense of loyalty. That is admirable, but doctors who attempt to defend colleagues when they know they are in the wrong are greatly to blame for their actions.

If the Bill were passed, the medical profession would no longer be encouraged to close ranks. Far fewer of their colleagues would have to be dragged before the courts, if the Bill became law. There would no longer be the need for secrecy, collusion and sometimes even distortion to defend

colleagues. The medical profession would more readily appreciate its responsibility to protect patients rather than colleagues, regardless of whether they are innocent or guilty.

The General Medical Council is already rethinking its disciplinary procedures. There will be substantial pressure on the GMC to get it right. The weakness of the NHS complaints procedure will be exposed by the Bill. It must be made effective. I remember hon. Members falling about with laughter when I explained some years ago how the GMC proposed to deal with complaints. It intended to give to consultants against whom a complaint had been made the right to veto who was to examine the complaint. The GMC was defending an absurd system, but now at last it has changed its mind. I hope that the new system will be both speedy and realistic.

The Bill will not solve all the problems. If enacted, the central difficulty will shift from proving negligence to proving causation. I appreciate and understand the exchanges between the hon. Member for Greenwich and other hon. Members during her speech. We cannot shirk the issue. Causation is always difficult. In the campaigns that I fought, including those on Thalidomide and Opren, causation was at the nub of the matter.

There can be heartbreaking aspects. After we won the thalidomide campaign and were awarded millions of pounds in damages from the company, an x list and a y list was drawn up. The x list comprised people who had definitely been damaged by Thalidomide. The hon. Member for Reading, East will recall that there was also a y list, comprising the people who probably had not been damaged by the drug. I fought savagely against the Distillers company, but I accept that the people on the y list should not receive any compensation. It should be a fundamental principle that compensation is paid only if causation is proved.

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): On Thalidomide, the right hon. Gentleman may recollect that both he and I informed the House that the courts had recommended that adjudicating panels be established, to ascertain who should be compensated and who should not. The company agreed that the panels should have the final say and that there would be no argument. The membership of those panels—which I set up throughout the country—included lawyers, but when it came to allotting compensation, they went over every single detail with the families yet again, causing them great hardship and anxiety. The legal attitude adopted in those cases was disgraceful.

Mr. Ashley: I vividly recollect the panels of which the hon. Gentleman speaks, and he played an important role in that controversy. I accept the relevance to the Bill of that incident, but the fact remains that causation is crucial.

If there is no causation, no compensation should be paid. That is only fair and reasonable. It would be unfair and unreasonable to demand compensation for negligence when no damage has been caused.

The objections to the Bill have no validity. Of course it does not cover every contingency. No legislation can do that. But it does represent a major advance for the House. If the Minister opposes the Bill, I shall be very sad and angry. If the Secretary of State acts like King Canute and tries to turn back the tide, he will find that he is trying to turn back the tide of public opinion. More than that, there comes a time for change with everything, and when it arrives nothing can stop it happening—not even Governments. The Bill will give justice to people who are horrendously, and in some cases appallingly, denied justice under the present system. Reform is long overdue. The Bill proposes reform, and I hope that the House will support it.

10.54 am

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): The House congratulates the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on the way in which she presented her Bill and on the enormous care and thought that has gone into it. None of us can be happy with the present situation, which is grossly unsatisfactory and unacceptable in a modern society. The matter needs urgent attention, for all the reasons that the hon. Member for Greenwich advanced.

I am deeply concerned about the enormous increase in defensive medicine in recent years. Few of us are aware of the extent to which it has developed and of the damage and dangers that it brings for patient care. Thousands of investigations are undertaken at great cost in terms of money and skilled time. Both would be better directed at reducing waiting lists, rather than being expended on investigations that doctors know are unnecessary but which lawyers and patients with high expectations think are needed.

I am concerned also about the number of X-rays undertaken for purely legal purposes. Every person who receives an injury to his chest thinks that he should have a chest X-ray, not realising that fractured ribs do not show up on X-rays for the first few days. The same applies in respect of suspected spinal injuries. Spine X-rays can be very dangerous in the case of pregnant women in particular.

The present situation is, for a whole range of reasons, intolerable. The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) spoke about Thalidomide cases. More recently, there were the appalling cases involving haemophiliacs. Only the sensitive awareness and action of my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State resolved a public disgrace.

For all these reasons, I am deeply sympathetic to the Bill, but I have reservations about it. I fear that it will increase bureaucracy, litigation and the amount of defensive medicine. Few people realise that it would also lead to a reduction in the compensation paid in some cases, because of the application of overall rules. Although the Bill is of immense service in bringing the subject of medical compensation to our attention, I hope that it will not receive a Second Reading. I shall not vote for it.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Although the hon. Gentleman has certain reservations about the Bill, would not it be better to allow them to be dealt with by amendments in Committee?

Sir Gerard Vaughan: That is a reasonable argument which I considered carefully, but I reluctantly dismissed it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should not shelter behind a few minor alterations or changes to the present system. Instead, he should accept that it is unsatisfactory and undertake to establish a proper working party to investigate the whole area and make recommendations, which my right hon. Friend should then implement speedily. The present situation cannot be allowed to continue.

10.57 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the opportunity to support the Bill. Given the reservations that have been expressed, it may be difficult to persuade the Government to introduce the kind of legislation that some right hon. and hon. Members claim is really needed. It is not enough for the Government to oppose the Bill unless they have an alternative that will redress grievances. Therefore, I hope that the Bill will receive a Second Reading, so that there can be further discussion and positive improvements.

Although I am not keen on separate Northern Ireland legislation, I thank the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) for taking the precaution of including Northern Ireland in the Bill, so that by the negative order procedure, its provisions could be extended to Northern Ireland—where the problems described today have been experienced.

The organisations that support the Bill include the Spinal Injuries Association and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation. In a perceptive article that appeared in January in *The Independent* and was headed

"Why medical negligence should be no one's fault"

a consultant in radiotherapy and oncology gave several examples showing why changes should be made and concluded:

"Such sad examples highlight not only the inefficiency of the present system, but also its immorality and its antipathy to what most of us would regard as 'natural justice'. It is also absurdly expensive. Few members of the public appreciate that lawyers and medical experts may well expect to be paid at least £100 an hour for this work—a sum that ensures a fat income for the growing army of medical negligence lawyers, yet could perhaps be better spent to benefit patients themselves."

I am not criticising the medical fraternity and the professions that supplement medicine. As one who owes more than one debt to careful medical provision, I pay tribute to the bulk of the profession who are careful and seek to serve their patients.

None the less, as the hon. Lady and others have admitted, the medical profession is made up of humans, as I discovered as a young man many years ago when my mother went into hospital for an appendix operation. I admit that perhaps the attitude of the public to the profession has changed somewhat over the years. We no longer naturally think of them as demi-gods, who have all knowledge and all experience and are therefore to be obeyed. When my mother was being prepared for her operation she discovered that the doctor was preparing the wrong side. She asked, "Doctor, is that the right side?" To which she got an expletive and, "Do you think that you can do this job better than me?" As a woman of 19, her response was, "No, doctor, I just thought that the appendix was on the other side of the body" at which there was another expletive and the doctor said, "I thought that you were in for something else." If she had not spoken out when she did God alone knows what would have been the result of that operation. Therefore, I believe that there is a case for compensation for mishaps, without going into the argument about negligence.

I shall briefly mention the poignant case of a dead constituent of mine who had a traumatic experience for five years, as she sought to have her case properly examined. On 17 September 1985 she entered hospital for a minor operation the next day, expecting to be discharged on 19 September. She was discharged a little more than three months later, on Christmas eve. A consultant, speaking to students around her bed said:

"This is what an anaesthetic can do to a patient."

However, we recognise that doctors differ and patients can die. A consultant neurologist was called in to examine her and said:

"I am sure this is a depressive illness with hysterical features."

He prescribed anti-depressant tablets. A senior registrar said that she was

"psychologically disturbed and had a morbid personality."

The first consultant did not believe any of those diagnoses, but did nothing about it and the hospital refused to let a consultant from another hospital see her files. The report took a long time to come through—until 1988. My constituent had to take early retirement through ill-health, and a dramatic change of lifestyle and a low pension.

The solicitor whom she engaged to look into the case said:

"It would be extremely hard to prove 'breach of duty of care for patient.'"

"Negligence" and "breach of duty" have to be proved. The consultant neurologist later said to her:

"I'm all in favour of patients knowing what we doctors write about in their files, but I think in your case it was a mistake that you found out."

There was a failure to follow through the formal procedures. There was an element of doubt, but it was not sufficient to allow her case to go to a hearing. The independent consultant, to whom she had been referred, gave an ambiguous report because he did not have the notes of her operation. That is a sort of defensive medicine, too—we do not like to have our notes revealed to other consultants.

As a result, my constituent was annoyed about the consultant's approach and wrote a letter setting out her anxieties. His response was that she had made a number of libellous statements. The big hammer of the profession came down on a patient seeking her rights.

In a letter of 7 March 1990 I was informed by the medical administrator of the hospital—to whom I had written to try to find out some information to help me when representing her, and to discover what was going on and why there were delays—that he could not reply because a writ of summons had been issued on 6 September 1989.

My constituent died in the late autumn of 1990. She was 56 years old. I knew her from my early days as an assistant minister in a congregation. I knew her family and knew what calibre of person she was. Even during her illness she spent any time that she could supporting others who were in need and on research for medical provision. She was not depressive, but was being depressed by the medical profession, as it was defending itself instead of helping a person in need. Therefore, I support the Bill.

11.7 am

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on her success in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on bringing forward such a potentially important measure. I also thank her for asking me to be one of the supporters, even though I had not seen the Bill when I accepted. She knows of my interest in the subject and I was grateful for her acknowledgement of it.

My interest in this subject dates back to a visit by a constituent soon after I became the Member of Parliament for Newbury. He told me about an operation for a cleft palate on his baby son, which went wrong. When he went to collect his son he collected a baby with only one foot. He came to see me because the lawyers representing the health authority were contesting a payment of compensation for a mistake made by the anaesthetist. The letter that they sent my constituent was unbelievably high handed and it was only due to my personal intervention on his behalf that we persuaded the health authority that if there was a case for compensation, this was it. I am glad to say that he got compensation.

That case left a mark on me and subsequently, during long spells in hospital, I had some personal experience of medical mishaps, which perhaps merely served to strengthen my view that all is not well with the present system of compensating for negligence.

I have referred to the measure before us as a potentially important Bill because, as it is drafted, I am not sure that it could be a proper alternative to the present system, where proof of medical negligence produces compensation. Certainly the victims of a medical accident should receive compensation speedily.

I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Member for Greenwich that the no-fault route is the right one to take. There has to be accountability. One cannot talk about accidents in which no one is to blame. That is not the real world. The hon. Lady told us that she envisaged safeguards in respect of what she described as reprehensible behaviour. I wish that she would spell that out. I must tell her that I shall have some difficulty in supporting the Bill today if she pursues the concept of no fault. The medical profession has no more right than any other profession to expect to be exempted from explaining its actions.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: Let me make it absolutely clear that I feel that accountability is vital. It is true that I maintain that there may be genuine accidents in which there has been no fault but in respect of which someone may be compensated; I am sure that the haemophiliacs who have been compensated fall into that category. But wherever there is evidence of behaviour that is inappropriate, careless, reprehensible or whatever, I would certainly intend the appropriate measures and follow-up to be undertaken.

I have given a great deal of thought to accountability. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that it is a difficult area, because there is a debate about whether the matter should fall within the ambit of the compensation board or should be handled separately. I felt it necessary to include the no-fault provision because it is not properly addressed anywhere else, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that I take the matter very seriously.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady.

Clause 1 is so widely drafted as apparently to provide compensation for any injury suffered due to mishaps during national health service treatment, although I admit that clause 2 qualifies clause 1 in its definitions of a mishap and of an injury. However, I am not easy with either. I am not a lawyer, so I do not know the legal significance of the words in clause 2:

"a person suffers 'injury', where as a result of a mishap in National Health Service care and not as a foreseeable and reasonable result of that care or the person's pre-existing condition, he . . . requires in-patient hospital treatment for 10 or more days; or . . . is prevented from engaging in normal activities"

—whatever they may be—

"for 28 or more days; . . . or suffers a reduction in his life expectancy."

Perhaps each of those reasons for claiming compensation would not be a matter for considerable legal argument, but it does not strike me that way. For example, can anybody say with any certainty how long any of us is likely to live?

If the Bill reaches its Committee stage, clauses 1 and 2 will need to be discussed and, in my view, heavily amended if we are to have in legislative form a real alternative to what is currently in place.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Did my hon. Friend make a Freudian slip in omitting to mention clause 2(5)(d), which refers to a person who suffers "significant pain, disability, harm" and so on? That is the provision which worries me most because

"significant pain, disability, harm, or distress or significant loss of amenity"

are perhaps the "injuries" that are most ill-defined and most difficult to define.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: I was trying to use shorthand for the various reasons, but I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point and could talk about it from personal experience.

I wish that the hon. Member for Greenwich had gone for a tighter definition than the one that she has chosen. I commend to her the Finnish Patient Injury Act 1986, which set out three grounds on which compensation would be paid:

"1. that an injury probably has arisen as a consequence of examination, treatment or any similar action, or neglect of the same.

2. has been caused by infection or circumstances connected with inflammation which probably has originated in the examination, treatment, or similar action.

3. has been caused by an accident (a) connected with examination, treatment or similar action, (b) occurred during ambulance transportation or in connection with fire or other damage to treatment premises or treatment equipment, or (c) resulting from a defect in medical equipment or in a medical care device."

The clearer that we make the possible grounds for compensation, the less disappointment there will be for those seeking it, and the simpler will be the task of those charged with deciding whether compensation should be paid. The fact that approximately 60 per cent. of those hoping for compensation under the Swedish and Finnish patient injury legislation actually get it shows how easy it is for people to assume that a compensation scheme covers every mishap. It cannot and it will not because being an in-patient in hospital is a hazardous business: hospitals are inevitably repositories of infection and disease and their hygiene and services are not always what they should be. I am not sure that I would want to be treated by a junior doctor at the end of his 90-hour shift. A recent survey carried out by Liverpool university showed that one person in 10 admitted to NHS hospitals acquired an infection unrelated to the reason for admission. As someone who has had to have three ribs removed as a result of septicaemia contracted in hospital, I am aware of the risk, although at present neither I nor any of the patients who pick up infections are eligible for compensation.

[Sir Michael McNair-Wilson]

Another report, this time by specialists, pointed out that about 2,000 people injured in road crashes and other accidents die every year because of mistakes, misjudgments and inadequacies in hospitals. That is an appalling number and shows that medical accidents are rather more commonplace than most of us care to admit.

Perhaps this is the point at which I should explain what I mean by a medical accident rather than negligence. I choose two definitions. The first, given in the House of Lords in 1904, defines an accident as an unlooked for mishap or untoward event which is not expected or designed. The second says that an error of judgment is not necessarily negligence. Negligence occurs when a professional person falls below the standard that can reasonably be expected of him. Thus, if we rely on negligence as the sole reason for providing compensation, many people who have suffered medical accidents will lose out. That must call into question the Government's attitude to compensation as we know it.

As I said, I commend the hon. Member for Greenwich, because, like a number of us on both sides of the House, she has recognised that the present system for compensating the victims of medical accidents is unfair, discriminatory, unreasonably expensive and unconscionably long winded. What is more, far from guaranteeing that every NHS patient can pursue a claim for compensation if he or she feels that he or she has been a victim of a medical accident, we have constructed a system for the use of the very rich, who can afford legal fees, and the very poor, who can get legal aid, but which is too expensive for the majority of us to pursue through the courts. That is the first and overriding reason why we need a change.

The second need is to speed up a process that may suit lawyers, because of its protracted and expensive nature, but which does nothing to enhance the idea that, under the national health service, compensation should be available speedily for those who have suffered medical injury as a result of inadequate treatment.

The hon. Member for Greenwich has encapsulated her solution to the problem in the Bill. I support the spirit of what she is trying to do, even if I do not support everything in the Bill. A new compensation scheme would need a compensation body to decide who gets what. For some time, however, I have held the view that, before a claim goes before a medical injury compensation board, it should be passed by some clearing house, such as the national health service ombudsman, as being a prima facie case for compensation. I know that at present the ombudsman is not allowed to investigate clinical complaints. I have always thought of that as a restriction which has made his job much less valuable than it should be. I would give the ombudsman a larger staff and the task of being the clearing house for the board.

Can we seriously contemplate a compensation scheme under which no attempt is made to discover whether that for which we are providing compensation was the result of negligence or simple human error? As I have said, I do not think so. By all means, let us pay the victim of a medical accident whatever compensation the board judges to be fair—and let us compensate quickly, not five to seven years after the event, as happens at present. But let us not walk away from the need to discover what went wrong and whether anybody was to blame. To allow that to happen would be to place the medical profession in a favoured and unreal position in which it was in no sense accountable for what it did.

That would do nothing to improve standards. After all, as well as speeding up compensation, any new scheme should seek to make doctors and hospitals more willing to be open about the way in which they work. If compensation is to be paid as of right, the question of accountability will no longer embrace the question of liability. That would be a considerable gain and it could end the wall of silence that currently prevents hospitals from offering an explanation of what has happened to a patient or commenting on a case, for fear of admitting liability. As the hon. Member for Greenwich said, an explanation would be much appreciated by so many people who just want to know what happened.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State whether, if the Government are as opposed to the Bill as they appear to be, they agree that the present system has serious shortcomings—they were graphically illustrated in a number of programmes on BBC 2 last autumn which were aptly entitled "Raw Deal"—which must be remedied. Are they aware of the increasingly vocal worries that are being expressed not only by those who cannot afford to seek compensation, but by professional medical bodies such as the Royal College of Physicians and the BMA, that the accountability of the NHS and those who work in it to those whom they look after is governed by the cost of lawyers' fees, despite the fact that the NHS is a service free to everyone at point of delivery?

In the light of that concern and the concern expressed in letters to hon. Members from bodies such as the National Spinal Association, the National Cancer Council, Mencap and the Haemophilia Society, what proposals do the Government have to improve matters? I know that they argue that in 1978 the Pearson report came out against a full-blown compensation scheme, but that was 12 years ago, when such schemes were in their infancy. Is not it time that the subject was recognised in the light of experience? Is not it time for a fresh inquiry to consider the subject of medical negligence and accidents and whether, if the present system stays in place, it will be able to meet the needs of those who may be victims of mishaps?

Quite apart from the intention of the Bill, which has all-party support, is not there a new EC directive that will become effective in 1993 and will place the onus on the doctor to prove that he has not been negligent, so upsetting the present approach? That could lead to defensive medicine and increased cost.

I know that the Government are worried that a new compensation scheme would be enormously expensive, and much more so than the present system. I can understand their worry and I find the King's Fund estimated that it might cost about £235 million a year more convincing than the BMA's £100 million. It will depend on the cost of setting up the scheme and on the size and number of awards that the compensation board makes.

I would not envisage compensation being given as huge lump sum payments, as at present, but as annual payments where a chronic condition is being compensated and modest lump sum payments for one-off accidents. Surely what matters is that we have a demonstrably fair and workable compensation scheme for the statistically small number of people who are the victims of medical accidents

within the national health service and who currently miss out because we rely on the outmoded civil law of tort to provide compensation.

I recently heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State talking of his child's treatment by the national health service and of his attitude to that treatment. He agreed that when it is one's own child, the NHS does not lend itself to becoming a health service that should be constrained solely within business disciplines. I agree with him. I add only that when one has been the victim of a massive drug rash, septacoemia or some other mishap that has forced an unwanted and unexpected hospital stay, imposed problems on one's family and possibly jeopardised one's employment, one is inclined to expect a measure of compensation by right as well as statutory sick pay and sickness and invalidity benefits.

I have referred to the statistically small number of people who are victims of medical accidents. I think that I am correct in that statement, but one of the more curious features of the subject is that the Department of Health does not collect figures centrally, so none of us can be certain how many claims there may be. When I wrote to the chief medical officer asking for guidance, he replied:

"The only relevant figures which we collect centrally for the hospital and community health services provided by health authorities are the numbers of formal written complaints whether or not they are wholly or partly clinical."

That is a strange admission and it makes the Government's hostility to the Bill even harder to understand, unless there is a principle involved that has not yet been stated. It certainly makes it impossible to know the statistical basis for their estimated cost of setting up a compensation scheme. I hope that they will give proper consideration to the Bill's suggestion for a national database so that those figures can be made available.

We hear that the Government intend to have an approved list of solicitors who specialise in negligence, who it is hoped will speed up the present legal process. We know that the Lord Chancellor has brought forward proposals for a no-win, no-payment approach to these cases. That has merit if one wins, but if one loses who pays the defence costs if the case is not fought on legal aid?

I do not deny that reducing the time within which compensation cases come to court would be helpful, but what of their cost? Under NHS indemnity, there seems to have been a saving in medical protection insurance premiums because the health authority bears the whole cost of any litigation and if it loses it pays out of its annual regional budget. That system must make the life of a regional chairman even more difficult than it has always been, because a big award may mean that he has to cut expenditure on new drugs—I am thinking particularly of Erythropoetin for kidney patients—or even close wards to balance the books. Surely that should not be the price that every other patient must pay for the negligent behaviour of a small number of his medical staff.

Is not it time that consideration was given to the make-up of compensation awards? If a lump sum is being provided, should it contain a figure for loss of earnings as well as a theoretical multiplier? These are matters for a fresh inquiry.

I must repeat that NHS indemnity does not sound like a satisfactory long-term approach to the problem, and I shall give just one illustration. Recently, I heard of a case in Oxford where the authority settled out of court because it was advised that it might not win and that, if it did not, costs would be awarded against it, which would have made the case far more expensive than settling out of court in the first place. That is not a good precedent. All these measures seem to be tinkering with a system that is less and less able to meet the needs of patients for whom the NHS has been a personal tragedy. The haemophiliacs illustrate that.

That is why I believe that a new approach is needed and why I support the principle behind the Bill, even if I have reservations about its detail. If the Government will not allow it to go further, at least let them recognise that it represents a genuine concern that patient rights have not been given proper attention in the past and that in a reformed national health service the clamour for more consideration to be given to the users of the service will not go away.

11.37 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The whole House will have welcomed the return to our proceedings of the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) and the particularly robust speech that he made.

I should like to think that the whole House would welcome what I regard as a splendid Bill, presented by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) in an excellent speech. I cannot recall a speech—the House will understand that I have followed private Member's Bills carefully in recent years—that had been more methodically researched. The hon. Lady was able to reassure hon. Members who wanted to be reassured about points that they raised.

The hon. Lady said that the Bill's aims are modest, but none the less it will be a major step forward for people who should benefit from it. I thought that the House would welcome her response to the hon. Member for Newbury, when she made it quite clear that the issue of compensation did not remove the need for accountability. If, for example, criminal acts take place within the health service, the law takes its course. If there are other procedures responding to other matters within the health service, issues will still be dealt with as they are now even if we introduce the issue of compensation.

Some of the arguments so far, either in interventions or in speeches from some Conservative Members, disappoint me in the extreme. Hon. Members may have some criticisms of the Bill. I have one or two very mild criticisms, as the hon. Member for Greenwich will appreciate. However, the procedures in this House and in another place should mean that if we accept the principle—and there seems to be overwhelming support for the principles in the country—in due course we can, in Standing Committee and elsewhere, address ourselves to some of the issues. If that is not the intention of some hon. Members, they are nit picking, which is most unworthy in terms of some of the injustices in the national health service today.

Mr. Gale: No speech this morning suggested that the present system is entirely or in any way satisfactory. I doubt whether any hon. Member here does not agree that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) has done a tremendous service in promoting the Bill. However, some of us believe that the long and short titles of the Bill do not permit the necessary changes and that is why we look to

[Mr. Gale]

our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to tell us later this morning that the Government will examine the matter and will bring forward the right legislation.

Mr. Clarke: The short and long titles of the Bill give considerable scope to the House. I have heard no interventions with which we could not deal in a reasonable debate in Committee. The hon. Gentleman's argument for voting against a Second Reading is bogus, unacceptable and unconvincing to the British people.

One argument that is produced time after time when we attempt to make progress in the House is that bureaucracy may take over. My heavens, the present system is riddled with bureaucracy, but it is not a bureaucracy that helps us to remove injustice or to make patients, their families and friends feel that if something goes wrong, which may be the result of a mistake, it will be put right or that reasonable compensation will be considered.

The issue of no fault is important. If we continue to relate disability benefits to whether the disability arises from birth or from an accident at home or at work, and if we have different systems for responding to individual needs, causation must be identified. I cannot think of a better way to do that than to have the board that the hon. Member for Greenwich proposes in her admirable Bill. The suggestion that such a scheme would cost a great deal of money and would be so expensive that the Government could not deal with it assumes that the Government are far more naive than their record suggests. They did not let the social fund run riot. They had cash limits and regulations, and they knew exactly what they were doing. I cannot imagine for a second that if the hon. Member for Greenwich manages to get the Bill through, as she deserves, the Government will act nonchalantly in seeking to deal with problems that may arise.

I said earlier that I have some very mild—and I emphasise that—criticisms of the Bill. They can, of course, be corrected in due course. If I have a criticism at all, it is simply that the Bill does not go far enough. However, I wish the hon. Member for Greenwich well and I know how difficult it is to get a Bill through the House. In many ways, it is the Government who should have accepted the responsibility that the hon. Lady has nobly accepted after being given her opportunity in the ballot.

One of my criticisms is that the Bill does not have an element of retrospection. That is rather sad especially in the light of the two constituency cases that I want to mention. I mention them because all of us are influenced by what people tell us in constituency correspondence and at our surgeries. We learn a great deal from people who present themselves on cold Saturday mornings to tell us of individual cases that relate to them, and which are relevant to existing legislation and to legislation that should exist.

I do not want to weary the House and I know that several hon. Members still wish to speak. The first case was featured recently in the *Glasgow Evening Times*. My constituent, Mr. Brian Smith, came to see me at my surgery in the mining village of Moodiesburn, but for greater ease of reference, I will simply report what the *Glasgow Evening Times* said. The article stated:

"A heartbroken husband pleaded today: 'Tell me why my wife died'. Amy Smith (35)"—

this happened last October—

"was admitted to hospital 16 days ago suffering from depression.

Husband Brian (35) said he made continuous anxious complaints to medical staff about her deteriorating condition.

But on Sunday the mother-of-three died . . .

Amy was admitted to Gartnavel General Hospital at the end of September. Brian, of Bridgeburn Drive, Moodiesburn, Lanarkshire, watched in horror as Amy deteriorated rapidly. He claimed doctors had doubled the dose of her medication.

And on Sunday he sat outside her room as medical staff called for ventilators and rushed consultants to her bedside.

'All week I tried to see someone and it was impossible. No one was ever available and no one listened to me. Then two hours before she died, there were crowds of people around her bed. But they told me nothing. I don't know whether she died peacefully, whether she was frightened or conscious or whether she even asked for me.'"

Even today, Brian and the three children do not know the cause of Amy's death. Her father died last February and she suffered from depression. Her family understood that she was being admitted to hospital for that reason. If we do not have a mechanism for dealing with such complaints, we have a great cause for worry. All of us have enormous faith in the national health service, but, if things go wrong, we want people to know exactly what happened and we want a mechanism for putting it right.

A second constituency case has caused me great concern. Michael Starrs is now 53. In 1958, Michael was given a grade A1 as a result of the examination for entering the forces. He appeared to be a healthy young man and he served in Northern Ireland in the King's Royal Hussars. He completed an apprenticeship as a moulder, left the Army in 1960 and married in 1961. In 1964, he developed a duodenal ulcer and on 25 March 1965, a crucial day in his life as he has explained several times, most recently last Sunday, he entered Hairmyres hospital in East Kilbride and was presented for an operation. As Micheal told me on Sunday:

"That was the day I lost my two most precious possessions, my health and my ability to earn the shilling."

I would, of course, have preferred a full inquiry to have taken place; my requests for one, however, have met with no success. The hon. Member for Greenwich has cited the problems of recollection experienced by someone who, at the time of the incident concerned, who under medication and preparing for an operation. Michael remembers being given a pre-med, but does not remember an anaesthetic being administered. He recalls being aware of being surrounded by people wearing masks who held him down forcibly; and he recalls part of his stomach hanging out.

Many years have passed since Michael's operation, during which I have engaged in a good deal of correspondence and a good many ministerial meetings. When I asked the Scottish Office health Minister, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) to instigate an inquiry, he told me that the only person in that operating theatre who is now still alive is Michael Starrs himself.

Surely that is an argument not for necessarily trying to apportion blame, but for accepting that something went badly wrong and that there is a valid case for compensation. Michael Starrs has suffered agony over the years, undergoing operation after operation—the most recent being major surgery to remove his gall bladder in 1988. He is unable to walk properly; he is very weak, and his digestive system has been almost totally ruined.

At present, the NHS has no mechanism to deal with cases such as those of Michael Starrs and Amy Smith. I am sure that other hon. Members can give examples from their constituencies. It is clearly time that something was done; so far the Government have not come up with any proposals, and I hope that, despite all the rumours that we

have heard, the Secretary of State will at least allow the House to consider the merits or otherwise of what I consider an admirable Bill.

It cannot be without significance that organisations such as the British Medical Association and other professional bodies, as well as consumers, have welcomed the Bill. As a Labour Member, I consider the role of the consumer very important. I see no inconsistency with the principles in which my hon. Friends and I believe; Robert Owen and the co-operative movement had a considerable influence on Labour thinking.

I have no wish to stigmatise the medical profession or to cause its members years of worry, but why should not those who use the NHS, and their family and friends, have recourse to help when things go wrong? I visited America recently and I know that the medical profession dislikes the thought of litigation hanging over it for years. The Bill would prevent many such instances. The Secretary of State indicates dissent; I hope that, when he winds up the debate, he will give us his reasons, but he must know that his views run counter to those of the professional organisations mentioned by the hon. Member for Greenwich.

Magnificent though I believe the NHS to be, in recent years the very strains and stresses experienced by the service have given us all the more reason to exercise vigilance in defending the rights of patients and their families. It would be positively uncaring for the Government not to allow us even to consider the Bill. It will be deplorable if the payroll vote turns up to oppose even its Second Reading. I consider the Bill laudable and worthy of debate and support. I wish the hon. Lady well, and hope that the Bill receives the backing that it deserves.

11.44 am

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Let me join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) both on winning the ballot and on the excellent way in which she presented the Bill.

As I am sure the hon. Lady will agree, under a no-fault compensation scheme there would be no need to prove negligence. There is no doubt that, as several hon. Members have pointed out, considerable problems are involved in proving negligence. Given the legal costs and the uncertainty, the present system is open only to the very poor and the very rich. There is also the difficulty of obtaining evidence, especially from medical records and from a profession that still tends to protect its own. The delay can be extraordinary: on average, three and a half years pass before action is even started in obstetric cases. The average duration of such cases is 6·7 years, and it frequently takes 10 or 11 years to bring them to a conclusion. Such delays are contrary to natural justice. People die before cases are concluded, witnesses are not available, records prove to be lost and, very often, witnesses simply cannot remember what happened.

One result of all that is that there are relatively few cases of medical compensation in this country—about 4,500 new cases a year, at a cost of about £75 million. Only about one case in three succeeds and it is widely considered unfair that only the most persistent litigant does so.

There are also the public-health and public-interest considerations, outlined by such people as the chief medical officer, Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, the Royal College of Physicians and the British Medical Association. They would say that the existing system destroys the patient-doctor relationship. Writing in *The Independent* on 8 January, Dr. Tobias, one of the consultants at University College hospital, makes the interesting observation that it is all a

"wretched business, with patients and doctors forced into confrontation by the adversarial methods of the British courts."

There are increasing worries about litigation, with the top awards now amounting to more than £1 million a case; there are also worries about defensive medicine and the system is widely regarded as unfair to doctors, who are seen as being on trial in court cases, even when they have taken reasonable risks.

Let me say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that many of those problems are genuine, as I think every hon. Member who has spoken—and many who have yet to speak—would agree. One or two problems are not genuine or are already being addressed, and some have better solutions; but most will need my right hon. Friend's active and vigorous intervention if improvements are to be made to the current system.

I say to the hon. Member for Greenwich, with the best will in the world, that I do not think that her Bill will solve the problems—and, indeed, it could make life considerably more difficult for some of those whom she is trying to assist.

Some of the problems that have been outlined are either in the process of being eased or likely to be eased shortly. Legal costs are an example. The most tragic cases involve brain-damaged babies, but, as from 1 April last year, it is now possible for a minor to apply to the courts for legal aid on the basis of its own income. Most children, of course, have no income and, as a result, far more such cases can be brought to court with the full protection of legal aid. In the first six months after that change in the rule, the number of such cases brought to the notification of the authorities trebled. It therefore follows that those children will be able to obtain justice much more easily in future.

The hon. Lady mentioned that the Access to Health Records Act 1990, the result of a private Member's Bill presented by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) with the support of the Department of Health, provides for patients to have access to medical records from November this year. The hon. Lady cited that as a reason for our needing the Bill; I cite it as a reason for our not needing it. One of the key problems, that of obtaining access to medical records, will diminish and, one hopes, disappear. Given the effort to which I went to improve access when I was at the Department, the change in attitude in both the Department and the BMA is most commendable.

My right hon. Friend should address the important issue of delay. In Sweden 60 per cent. of all claims are settled within two months, and 93 per cent. within six months; here, as I have said, it can take many years. A quarter of obstetric claims do not come to the attention of the hospitals until more than seven years after the births. The system in Britain is very different. The Bill refers to a timespan of six months. That would be very tight particularly in many of the most tragic cases. Mr. Brian Capstick, a lawyer writing in the *British Medical Journal* on 26 January, suggested a period of 18 months. The

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

Limitation Act 1980 refers to three years in the case of a death. It should be possible to make an effective time limit on some cases.

Much of the delay in payment is due not to the way in which the law works, but to the way in which health authorities work. I stood at the Dispatch Box in 1988 and admitted liability for cases in Exeter in which patients had been excessively irradiated by equipment that had been faultily calibrated. It took another year before the health authority admitted liability. Two years on, many of those cases have not been settled. That is absolutely scandalous. The cases involving the largest pay-outs, the most spectacular cases about which the public hear, are often those in which health authorities offer a financial settlement perhaps three days before the cases go to court. That might be years after the event. That could be corrected easily through the assistance and at the insistence of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend has made a valuable point. Does she agree that, in practice, when the defendant is effectively an insurance company which knows that it is being opposed by someone who does not have legal aid, it will keep the case going to the last minute to try to grind that person down? As a lawyer, I have acted for both plaintiffs and defendants and have used that tactic. The way out of that problem is to have particular classes of action, such as actions in respect of medical negligence, in which the case is assessed only on its merit with regard to legal aid. It is not assessed on account of means. At a stroke, that would take care of the kind of case that my hon. Friend has rightly put to the House.

Mrs. Currie: I suspect that my hon. Friend's profession will do well whether or not this Bill receives a Second Reading today. Although insurance cases are not covered by the Bill, it is worth pointing out that nine out of 10 insurance claims for motor accidents are paid out eventually one way or another. The certainty that people will receive a payment is a big help. With regard to compensation for compulsory purchase cases in which there may be a dispute about the value of a property, the local authority is obliged to pay out very quickly 90 per cent. of the expected amount. The relatively minor amount can then be disputed. However, the individual in such a case benefits.

The Bill could create difficulties and if we were to follow the path proposed today, we would live to regret it. The Bill does not avoid people having to go to court. The compensation board proposed in clause 4(9) would be able to initiate legal cases. As a result, there would be many more cases.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be inappropriate for the board to make large settlements on the part of third parties with no attempt to recoup them? One of the intentions of the Bill is to remove patients from the on-going proceedings, but not for the state to pick up the Bill that should naturally be the responsibility of the appropriate company or authority.

Mrs. Currie: I can see why that provision is included in the Bill. It is an improvement on the proposal in the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) last year which would have removed people's rights and, in that sense, was, I believe, iniquitous. Most people who are interested in this matter believe that a no-fault compensation scheme will avoid the need for all those terrible court cases. However, it will not. There will be just as many terrible court cases. Indeed, there will be a lot more of them.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: Does not the hon. Lady accept that in cases such as Thalidomide or Opren there would be one court case between the board and the company instead of the hundreds or thousands that are going on at the moment? That would be a great improvement for everyone involved.

Mrs. Currie: It is worth pointing out that well over 2,000 of the Opren claimants have been paid. It was shown yesterday that some of those claimants had failed to make a claim within the reasonable time limit, which is six times the limit suggested in the Bill.

We should not abrogate people's legal rights. However, the introduction of a no-fault compensation scheme in which the board could initiate action may well result—in fact, I am certain that it would result—in more such cases and not fewer.

The Bill also does not avoid people having to prove fault. To make a successful case under the no-fault compensation scheme suggested in the Bill a patient would need three things: a problem; a medical event; and a proven link between the two. Without those requirements, spurious claims would be paid. Even in New Zealand where the pay-out is based on accidents, people still have to show that the problem was caused by an accident and did not have a natural cause.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Surely it is one thing to prove fault, but another to prove negligence. So many of us feel strongly about the need to prove negligence, not fault.

Mrs. Currie: The process of proving fault is similar to the process of proving that someone caused that fault. In practice the evidence must still be obtained.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): The difference in the Bill is not the difference between proving fault and proving negligence—this is a no-fault Bill. The difference in the Bill is that instead of having to produce causal links and negligence, one need only prove the causal links. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) has not understood that. She certainly is not addressing that point.

Mrs. Currie: It is very difficult to prove fault. For example, 1,500 babies a year are born with cerebral palsy —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Peckham is not listening so she will not understand what I am saying.

It is extremely difficult in most of the cases involving those babies born with cerebral palsy to prove that that condition is anyone's fault. It is in the nature of medical events that most of what happens is caused by the nature of the disease or the risk associated with the treatment or by some natural process. Most cerebral palsy is caused by congenital problems. The tragedy is that when people try to prove fault, they must still go through a similar process. Although it may not be so complete as pinning it on an individual, they must still show fault.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Currie: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not give way. I have already given way more than any other speaker and it might be helpful if I make progress.

If the Bill or something like it is enacted, there will be a serious danger that if we do not try to prove negligence, bad doctors might get off. What is so terrible about proving fault and negligence? I can understand that the British Medical Association and our doctors might think that it was terrible, but we must bear in mind the confidential enquiry into peri-operative deaths—CEPOD—which showed that 21 per cent. of deaths within 30 days of surgery were caused by anaesthetists and surgeons. There are obviously a lot of serious medical faults around. That confidential inquiry was produced only after a battle was waged; many doctors refused to co-operate with it. Of course, doctors want a no-fault compensation scheme because some of them do not want their fault to be identified.

Doctor Tobias at University College hospital has stated:

"in cases of minor head injury, it is increasingly felt unwise for a clinician to discharge a patient from hospital after clinical examination has revealed no apparent damage. Instead there is a growing reliance on skull X-rays and even brain scans, since these provide 'hard evidence' should the patient later become unwell, sue the hospital and the case be brought to court."

If I had had a bang on the head, I would want the brain scan and the X-rays not because I might sue, but because I might die or suffer brain damage otherwise. If defensive medicine leads to better medicine, I am all in favour of it.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should consider research in Florida that was reported in the *British Medical Journal* on 29 September 1990. It was found that, in the medical group, 85 per cent. of pay-outs on medical negligence cases were sustained on behalf of only 3 per cent. of doctors. When those doctors' history was checked, it was found that the high payment group had had a large number of complaints against them, particularly in the period four to five years previously. We put up with bad practice far too much. Bad doctors should be tackled. That job is partly for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the General Medical Council, and it is a jolly good job that the British Medical Association may like to take it on board.

I now refer to the point about patient-doctor relationships suffering in the existing system. I am not sure about that. A patient who thinks the world of his doctor does not sue. The patient-doctor relationship has broken down before anybody starts to make a complaint, and the usual problem is precisely that. All the cases that were described so movingly this morning have evolved not from there being a need for no-fault compensation but from the need for better communication between patients and their doctors. In that sense, the new consent form, which was brought in recently and which is so bitterly resented by some doctors, is a step in the right direction towards getting informed consent.

The main problem is costs. The hon. Member for Greenwich has suggested a figure, the BMA has suggested a figure—everyone has suggested a figure. Again, the *British Medical Journal*, on 29 September 1990 made an effort. One in 25 patients in this country admitted to hospital experiences harm as a result of their stay in hospital. A fifth of all deaths in hospitals may be caused by something going wrong. We know that that is true of surgery. About 300,000 patients in the United Kingdom a year therefore might experience harm, and 45,000 deaths may be caused by that harm, and that would give rise to 75,000 potential cases of negligence from hospital admissions alone. That does not count out-patients attending for surgery—it would be many times that number—and it does not count attendances for general practice.

If we had 75,000 cases at the current average pay-out rate, which is about £17,000, we would be talking not about a couple of hundred million, but about £1·2 billion. That is not far-fetched. The New Zealand scheme costs more than £300 million a year, and that is 1·4 per cent. of their gross national product. In this country we would be talking about several billion pounds for an equivalent figure. If hon. Members think that £1 billion might be far-fetched, let me remind them that, in 1979, we thought that it would be a wonderful idea to give substantial social security payments to old people living in private residential care. The cost in 1979 was 10 million quid. The cost last year was £1·1 billion. We are talking about a potentially enormous amount of money. An effective scheme would cost the earth, and the money would be better spent on improving health care.

Therefore, I do not feel that we should be aiming to introduce no-fault compensation. We should be aiming at fewer faults. We should be aiming at having fewer cases that might lead to such complaints, and we should be indulging in a vigorous pursuit of those at fault and of improvements to reduce the damage that potentially they can do. That would be a lot easier if we were not spending enormous sums of money on thousands of relatively modest claims.

12.3 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). She seemed to have some difficulty in appreciating the difference between fault and negligence. That is at the root of the system of tort in England and Wales and delict in Scotland—the requirement to prove negligence and the causal link between the incident and the harm.

As a practising solicitor, I have come across many cases in which fault has been alleged, but it has been impossible to prove negligence. There is a real sense of grievance and injustice on the part of an individual in that situation, particularly when he or she has had to go through the hoops and hurdles of the legal system before a case can get into court. Most people find it necessary to apply for legal aid. There is difficulty in receiving legal aid. Also, a prior test is required and, thereafter, there are long delays before cases come to court.

The biggest problem for people who must go through that process after an injury has been caused to them and the change that inevitably occurs to their lives is the complete uncertainty in the system and what it means to them. They can be recovering from the trauma of physical damage but be left with the stress and strain of uncertainty for many years while cases work through our legal system. It is not uncommon for cases to take seven, eight or more years to be heard before the original incident is dealt with. For that and many other reasons, I have long been a supporter of a no-fault liability scheme, not just in cases of medical evidence but for other matters covered by, for example, the New Zealand scheme or the Canadian and Saskatchewan schemes, which were pioneers.

[Mr. Frank Doran]

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South made much of the cost of the New Zealand scheme. She omitted to mention that it covers not only medical negligence but a range of insurance matters, including road traffic liability and third-party liability under their traffic legislation. Of course it is expensive—so would ours be if all those matters were lumped together.

When I read the Bill, I was struck by the compromises that would have to be made if we set up a no-fault scheme. Clearly, many aspects are left out of the Bill, but they should be an essential part of any scheme. One point that worries me is protection for patients. Legal assistance for patients who have to present cases should be provided. Other hon. Members have mentioned the problem of full access to medical records and assistance in understanding and interpreting them. We should also consider how to deal with the problem of assessing the damages required to be paid. The board that would be set up by the Bill would be a self-perpetuating body which would require some outside influence in determining what damages should be paid. If it had a monopoly, how would it make such an assessment? What comparisons would it make? There are gaps in the Bill. Again, that is part of the inevitable compromise.

There is opposition across a broad range of the establishment, not just on Conservative Benches—I know that it exists on my side of the House also—to the principle of no-fault compensation. One thing that strikes me most is that the Bill focuses on the national health service. In many respects, that service is in a unique position because it is a public body and is directly answerable to the Secretary of State for Health. There are many advantages of the scheme, particularly for the national health service.

We have heard about the potential cost of the scheme. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South gave grossly inflated figures concerning the likely consequences. Not every incident will result in a claim and not every incident that results in a claim will result in a claim worth the average figure of £17,000. That is certainly not the experience of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): According to a parliamentary question that was answered by the Scottish Minister with responsibility for health, the sum paid out last year in Scotland in cases of compensation amounted to £1·364 million. That was based on an average claim, including claimant's costs, of £17,000. For our country we are not talking about a great deal of money, are we?

Mr. Doran: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, and I shall develop it. What is not included in the costing of the scheme is the court time involved, legal aid costs, which are all costs to the state, the problems within the health service that are created by any litigation, and the cost of running legal services. I have already mentioned the legal costs across the board.

The distraction of the staff is also important. The involvement of any member of staff in a legal claim is a fairly major event for that individual. A whole department may be involved in a claim. I was involved in a complaint brought by one of my constituents recently. It will not result in a claim against the health service, but there appeared to have been negligence. For many months the staff of one department in my local hospital were caught up and distracted. Many of them were worried and stressed by the implications of that complaint. The cost of such stress is never assessed and taken into account when we examine the cost of the present system.

The present system results in several costs both within and outside the system. One is the worry and stress on individuals who are the subject of the fault or negligence claim. That in itself can create costs for the state such as extra industrial injuries benefit or social security benefits for someone who cannot return to work quickly or may suffer illness brought about by the stress and strain of the legal process which they must pursue.

As I said, the NHS is in a unique position because it is a public body through and through. Opposition Members, who support the NHS, want to see it continue to be a public body through and through. The Government are worried about the cost of insurance against negligence and brought in the system of Crown indemnity. That is a step in the right direction because it has taken central control, at least through the various health boards, of health service insurance. The service is becoming self-insured. I have some experience of that because I worked in public bodies—one nationalised industry and a local authority —which made exactly the same decision in respect of their insurance claims. They discovered that they were paying an enormous amount in insurance premiums and that the return from them did not make economic sense. So they decided to become self-insured. They spent the £50,000 premium on setting up their own insurance.

It is common practice now throughout the public sector to pay the equivalent of the insurance premium into a fund that slowly builds up and allows bodies to meet all their insurance claims. I am not sure whether there is a similar practice in the health service. The practice means that bodies can carry their own insurance and keep control of it. They are not in the hands of an insurance company when deciding whether a claim should be settled. They can meet claims or fight them if they decide that they want to do so. They can make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Administrative costs were cut dramatically by adopting that practice. With on-going payments into the fund, bodies have control of a substantial fund to meet all their liabilities. There is no reason why something similar should not be introduced into the health service. As we heard earlier, the health service spends about £75 million on direct payments of costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) gave us the example from Scotland. That is an enormous amount of money and I am sure that there is scope for making savings.

The Health Secretary could examine how the system of Crown indemnity might be extended. It would not necessarily require legislation. It could be done administratively. Why not consider the possibility of an experiment in one health board and see what could be done?

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board was introduced administratively and has operated for 20-odd years. It is subject to delays and there are real criticisms about the way in which it operates, but at least it provides compensation in an area where no compensation was previously available in practice although technically it was always available. There is no reason why the same could not be done in the health service.

The Secretary of State could introduce a scheme whereby an area board did away with the concept of legal challenges and assessed claims on their merits, not necessarily, in the first instance, on the basis of fault, but on the usual legal basis of legal liability for damage caused by negligence. The Secretary of State could experiment and see what effect that scheme had on the area. I am convinced that there would be practical savings which would be extended to the patients making the claims. It would remove from them the uncertainty and fear of the legal process, which I mentioned earlier. Such an experiment would be a valuable test of whether such a scheme could be extended beyond the area of the experiment.

No matter what hon. Members on both sides of the House say about the Bill—we know that the Government have called in the troops to vote against the Bill, so we know their position—there is great anxiety about the way in which compensation claims are dealt with in the health service. It is not good enough to bat down the measure and say that it is inappropriate. Clearly, such measures will be introduced regularly in the House. We want to hear something from the Government about what they propose and how they see the way forward. Shall we be stuck with the rigidities, inequities and inconsistencies of the present system, or does the Secretary of State have some practical proposals to put to the House to show us the way ahead and give us something against which we can test the present system? I do not expect an immediate answer on my idea of an experiment, but I should like the Secretary of State to consider whether it is possible to introduce a scheme administratively as an experiment somewhere in the country.

12.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): I found the speech of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) interesting. I shall come back to some of his suggestions for improving the present position by administrative means. There are some ways of doing that and I have one suggestion which I hope will interest the House later. However, we should be a little careful about analogies with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board because it has the advantage of having settled beyond peradventure all questions of fault. Criminal liability has been established. It settles the causation in pretty well all cases. It establishes only a small amount of damages. Although it is a useful board, one must be careful with the analogy the health service. It is certainly not analogous with the type of board proposed by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes).

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I remind the Secretary of State that some industries have similar boards which have dealt well with complicated cases where bitterness may arise out of the board's decision. For example, in the coal industry a large number of cases is dealt with. The greatest hardship is taken out of the compensation case before the case comes to court. In certain cases the company is taken to court, but not in all cases, and therefore the courts are not clogged up.

Mr. Waldegrave: There may be arrangements to deal with certain categories of cases in comparable ways, but I shall come back to the matter.

I thank the hon. Member for Greenwich for bringing the House back to an important, interesting and difficult subject. It is not a party subject as such. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), with her usual skill, will attempt to make it so. The begetter of the no-fault compensation lobby, which goes back to the 1950s, was the late lamented Member and great friend of mine, Sir John Foster, who badgered me when I was in the civil service long ago in the 1970s on no-fault compensation schemes. He found a Government more susceptible than ours to his arguments in New Zealand. I am not sure that the New Zealand Government are universally pleased that they allowed themselves to be so badgered by Sir John.

There are supporters and opponents on both sides of the House of the principle of a no-fault compensation scheme. So far in the debate few people have been willing to say that the operation of the law is satisfactory in respect of medical negligence cases and the definition of who is responsible for what at present. I count myself among that consensus, and therefore I shall try to meet some of the points made by my hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Greenwich.

I repeat that although this is not a party matter, it is a matter on which no Government can stand back and simply allow things to fall out where they may. Immensely important issues are involved. We are being asked to change the relationship between the victim of harm and the person who caused it. That relationship has developed over many years in common law. I believe that the first claims against doctors go back 600 years.

There is nothing to say that the House should not, from time to time, have a go at overturning long-established principles, and we do. However, we must have a strong case to prove that our actions are right.

If we were to overturn the present relationship between someone whose damage is caused by the fault of a doctor in the NHS—it is important to remember that we are talking about only one sector of the medical profession —there would be major implications for such relationships in many other sectors. I must warn the House about that. However much it is legitimate for the hon. Member for Greenwich to say that she cannot solve all the problems at once in one Bill, it is also the duty of the House, and certainly the Government, to consider the implications of the Bill across the board.

Dr. Godman: I know that it is no answer to the problems suffered by someone who experiences massive negligence at the hands of a consultant during an operation, but would not it put the mind of the public at ease slightly if the Government introduced a more efficient disciplinary procedure for the conduct of consultants?

Mr. Waldegrave: Some important comments have been made on that matter today. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), in her characteristically robust style, drew the attention of the General Medical Council to the unease that still exists, although I accept it has addressed some of the problems. We all share that feeling. I remind the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that, with the support of the House and the leaders of the medical profession, various things have been done in terms of a peer-group review of the skills of doctors—a medical audit. In common with all self-governing professions, the GMC has a tremendous

[Mr. Waldegrave]

duty to relieve public unease by ensuring that the inevitable solidarity that exists in the profession does not overpower the need for justice and accountability. Accountability is an important theme and I am not sure that we heard enough about it in the lead-up to the Bill, although important comments have been made about it today.

We should make such a fundamental change in an important area of our public life only if we have before us a most compelling and coherent case. Preferably we should be able to study exemplars from abroad to see how to do it. We should make that change only when there has been a clear and practical exposition of not just the principle in the broadest sense, but of how it will work. That is what a Second Reading debate is for. Some hon. Members have suggested that we can push the Bill into Committee to sort out the details, but we need to know whether the majority of the House has agreed on a clear principle on which the Committee and experts in my Department can work to make practical.

People have gathered round the no-fault compensation banner for many years, but it is a banner with many different emblems. I read the accounts of the press conference of the hon. Member for Greenwich and I have read the letters from organisations expressing support for the Bill's principle. It is noticeable how differently they render that principle and how few of those organisations are willing to say that they are in favour of a Bill—be it the one introduced today by the hon. Member for Greenwich or that introduced by the hon. Member for Peckham. At that point the House has the right to ask whether those differences exist because it is not easy to produce a Bill embodying that principle which works. I do not believe that the Bill's ability to embody that principle has been demonstrated today and I shall try to explain why.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): No one is suggesting that it is easy, but we believe that what is proposed is better than what has gone before. Unless the Minister has any better suggestions—we should have heard them before this debate and they should not be tagged on to the end of his speech—he should allow the Bill its Second Reading.

Mr. Waldegrave: Although it was put in the hon. Gentleman's characteristically emollient way, his point is fair. I believe that I shall be able to demonstrate that the desire for change would not be met by the Bill and that, in a number of crucial respects, the Bill would make things worse. That also goes for all the other Bills that have attempted to embody the principle of no-fault compensation. Perhaps the principle is easy to state in the highest level of generality, but not so easy to carry into law. As a result of the Second Reading the House must know that it is submitting to the Committee something that can be made into reasonable law that will improve matters.

The hon. Member for Greenwich listed the criteria that the Bill is designed to meet and we are all agreed on those criteria. The hon. Lady is seeking to improve on the unfairness of the present system and I agree that, in many respects, the present arrangements are perceived as unfair. There is a basic perception that such compensation claims are a lottery. The family of one baby who has suffered may receive £1 million, but another baby with a similar injury may get nothing or only social security support. The new system will involve major changes to principles that have existed in law for many years and we must be certain that it will produce a better system with less unfairness.

We all respect the concern that the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) has expressed on this matter, and on other similar matters, but it is no good saying that it is disgraceful of me to oppose something if the origin of my opposition is my belief that the Bill will make matters worse. I must try to persuade the right hon. Gentleman of that.

Would we have less unfairness as a result of the Bill? Clearly not. We would still have negligence claims—I plead with hon. Members to remember that. The hon. Lady played down the fact that people may not like the compensation offered by the board—the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Peckham have rightly said that such compensation must be cash limited and the hon. Member for Peckham has reiterated that the Labour party is committed to cash-limiting the health service—because the awards will not be very big. Comparison has been made with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board—we should not follow that comparison too far—but it deals only in awards of between £2,000 and £3,000.

Under the most analogous foreign systems—although none of them approximates closely to the system that we would obtain under the Bill—the sums awarded would be between £10,000 and £20,000. On the advice of their lawyers many people will refuse such awards, thinking that they will get more by suing for negligence and damages through the courts. So many of the most heart-rending cases will continue. The hon. Member for Greenwich offered a most moving example in her speech today and at her press conference—of a woman who took her case through all the courts and finally lost, on the issue of causation I believe. Costs were awarded against her and the whole episode was a terrible disaster. Her solicitor, who was also present at the press conference, said, as I understand it, that this Bill would make no difference to such cases: the woman would have been likely to pursue her case in any event. So this is one category of unfairness that would persist under the Bill——

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: The lady in question has made her case well known and she has made it clear that she pursued the case through the courts in the first place to get to the bottom of what happened and to be given a proper explanation. She is, of course, devastated by the £150,000 costs awarded against her, but she is less worried about having lost her award. It must be forcibly stated that the courts are sometimes used to get explanations that are otherwise unobtainable.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is a fair point, but the solicitor, Mr. Body, said that since the woman ultimately lost on causation she would not have got compensation from the board either—so her case would not have been helped at all.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Access to Health Records Act 1990 was drafted a little more narrowly than it should have been and that the way to get increased access to medical information for patients might lie in re-examining that Act and perhaps other measures of that nature, instead of following the proposal of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes)?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) greatly assisted the progress that we have made on medical records, although the Act has not yet come into force and we must see how it works when it does.

There would be new unfairnesses under the Bill. In the past few days large compensation claims have been paid to children involved in tragic car accidents. Clear fault was established and I expect that the insurance companies ultimately paid the people involved. Such cases will also persist. Similar cases involving brain-damaged children and damage done by other public services will be settled with no change from the present system. No one could claim that that would be fairer than what happens now. If a person is hit by a British Rail train and full negligence is not shown, that person will receive no compensation; but people who are the subject of accidents in the health service will have an automatic right to some compensation. Of course, the hon. Member for Greenwich says that she cannot deal with everything at once, but she is pushing us in the direction of what happens in New Zealand, although everyone, including the hon. Members for Peckham and for Greenwich, now agrees that the New Zealand system is cracking up. It does not work and New Zealanders are backing away from it. The hon. Member for Peckham may say that the Labour party is committed to introducing such a Bill; if so, she is committing her party to another £300 million or £400 million of expenditure. She should talk to some of the lawyers in her party—they may not be as keen as she is. We do not want to land ourselves in a frightful muddle.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in all the cases that have been mentioned it is probably possible to obtain redress through the courts, but that the group who have been really unfairly treated are the nuclear test veterans who cannot take action through the courts?

Mr. Waldegrave: That runs well outside my departmental responsibilities, but I agree with the first part of my right hon. Friend's intervention.

Yet another extraordinary unfairness would arise under the Bill. Let us imagine that the board pays compensation in a case but then comes to the conclusion that it should take the case forward for negligence, even though the person involved has not, possibly because he is satisfied by the quicker process. The board might win its case for compensation and, having awarded the victim £50,000, win £1 million. In that case the person concerned would get no more money; other claimants with less good cases would get it, because it would spread among other cases under the regime of the Bill. That would not be right. People would claim strongly that the money that had been won was theirs. Perhaps that anomaly could be removed in Committee, but there are signs that the problem has not been thought through.

Mr. Doran: The board's claim would be limited to its own loss. It is not a case of the injured person's loss being transmitted and that being the test. The test is what the board has paid out.

Mr. Waldegrave: If the board fought a negligence case, it would gain what the individual would have received if the case had been fought by that individual. The individual would have won, just as the board had won. The individual would then receive compensation on the usual basis. The hon. Gentleman cannot escape from that conclusion.

The procedure involves acute unfairness to doctors. There is a double jeopardy. The doctor is asked to co-operate with the board. He is asked to apologise. Dubious causation is established. Then a negligence claim is made by the board against him. I do not believe that a doctor should be put in that position.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: It is not intended that the board should enter into negligence actions against NHS employees, including doctors. The intention is to take action against third parties—NHS suppliers whose products may have caused a problem through being faulty. The intention is to recoup that money. We do not intend to pursue the doctors through the courts. We want to refer to the appropiate authority only matters that are not being dealt with.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is a new and fundamental principle—that only one category of negligence claims is to be pursued by the board. Such a new idea would be difficult to uphold. There would be cases under the criteria set out by the hon. Lady where it would be right for the board to sue a doctor for negligence. If the intention is to sue only Eli Lilly, which, rather to my astonishment, is in alliance with the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South because it is in favour of the Bill, I am told by one of my hon. Friends—it must be the first time in history that that particular alliance has been forged—that would be a new source of unfairness. Only one form of negligence case would be pursued, not others. That is why I am willing to debate with the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South my view that my opposition is not inhuman; I am just trying to find out whether the Bill would improve the position. I believe that it does not do away with unfairness. It introduces much more unfairness.

The second criticism of the present system relates to accountability. The hon. Member for Greenwich made the point at her press conference that if the case is settled out of court there will be little accountability. The Bill does nothing about that. The best negligence cases that the hon. Lady's Bill will not exclude—although the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Peckham would have excluded them—will continue to be settled out of court, just as they are now. Therefore, the Bill provides no help in that direction. However, together with the presidents of the royal colleges, we should try to draw explicit lessons from court cases. I shall return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir. M. McNair-Wilson) about gathering information centrally to draw lessons that can be fed into our growing means of improving medical standards, audits and so on, based on existing cases.

Difficulty over access to the ordinary court system often prevents an explanation of and the disentangling of tragic events. Above all, in my constituency experience, people want to know whether negligence could have been avoided. We want people to be able to gain quicker and better access to the courts.

Unusually for a Secretary of State standing at the Dispatch Box, I have to say that I am alarmed by the degree of power that is given to me and my successors by the Bill. At two crucial points in it, important matters are left to the Secretary of State for his guidance. Causation,

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which could often be proved before the board only with great difficulty, will not accord with the usual legal definition, because I am to make my definition

"having regard to the difficulties in establishing causation in law."

My new definition, which will be more intelligent and sensitive than that developed over hundreds of years by lawyers, will be compared with the definition used by the courts when dealing with the same case. That would be extremely odd. The board may pursue a case in the High Court and a verdict may be reached according to the normal definitions of law, but that will be compared with a wholly different definition used by me. If there is no difference, what is the point of a new definition? If I establish a new definition, it will create a fresh set of problems and conflict with the existing legal system.

The Bill would also allow me, under schedule 2, to do all sorts of unnamed things in relation to disciplinary bodies. That is not something that should be sorted out later in Committee. If I were to come to the House and ask for such powers, I would be met with a good deal of uproar from the Opposition, and certainly my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) would find such a proposal intolerable.

The pig in the poke that we are being asked to buy will, by its very nature, diminish accountability. That is the nature of no-fault schemes—and part of their merits in the eyes of their proponents. They do not seek to lay blame. If one wants to do that, there is no escape from the much-maligned adversarial court system. If one wants to put the blame on someone, that individual must be allowed to defend himself—and will therefore place himself in an adversarial position, of the sort that I find myself adopting towards the hon. Gentleman to whom I give way.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Secretary of State introduces a new dimension that runs counter to an argument that the Minister for Health, who is seated next to the right hon. Gentleman, will recall from the Committee debates in 1989 on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. Then, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor took upon himself power upon power, without as much as an apology or a blush. Is the Secretary of State announcing a policy change? If he is worried about the time taken by courts to deal with cases, do his calculations about bureaucracy and costs take into account the abuse of the existing system? Will not the Bill give the right hon. Gentleman an opportunity to do something about that?

Mr. Waldegrave: A private Member's Bill comes to the House with the major and difficult issues left for the Secretary of State to address. On Second Reading, we should be debating matters such as the nature of causation and the sort of no-fault concept that we have in mind.

I refer to the point about double jeopardy made by the hon. Member for Peckham. Schedule 2(6) states:

"Where the Board pursues any legal claim which it has passed to it, the value of that claim shall not be restricted to the level of compensation that the Board has paid to the claimant, but shall be assessed by reference to the damages that would have been awarded to the claimant had he pursued the legal claim himself."

I thought that my earlier remarks were correct, so it seems that the hon. Member for Peckham has not read to the end of the Bill. I only argue with the hon. Lady because she has been making inflammatory remarks from a sedentary position and occasionally I must be allowed to strike back.

There is a consensus in the House that cases should be dealt with by the courts more quickly and in a fairer way. However, there is the danger of litigiousness and a horror of the sort of cases that arise in America. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is bound to be in favour of this revolutionary change, on principle. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is a reformer."] Yes, he is a genuine reformer. However, would the dramatic reform that we are being asked to consider limit litigiousness? That is a prefectly reasonable question for the hon. Member for Greenwich, as it is one of the reforms which she claims for her Bill. It will not do so, for the following reasons. There would be bound to be more cases against the NHS under this proposal, because a lower level of proof would be required to get compensation, as no fault is involved. If I am allowed the powers granted in the Bill there will be a lower test of causation than the reasonable test that the courts use at present which will result in many more cases. There would be more claims against the national health service than against any other service, because claims against other services would still be dealt with using the recognised legal concept of causation.

With all respect to my hon. Friends and to Opposition Members who are lawyers, the legal profession will not turn down the chance of a whole new industry of bringing cases against the NHS. One sees advertisements for solicitors in newspapers now. I saw such an advert in a Hampshire paper last week which said, "Do you feel you have a negligence claim against the NHS?" I suppose that that is fair enough, and that solicitors should be able to publicise, but the Bill would result in a great deal of pressure to bring cases because of the lower criteria required.

American litigiousness has produced a new phenomenon called defensive medicine, although there is more anecdote than proof of it. As a result of this Bill there will be a new form of defensive medicine. The present form —if it exists and whether or not it is a bad thing—would remain and ordinary negligence cases would continue as at present. The Bill does not exclude that. However, a new form of defensive medicine would emerge.

All medicine has risks attached to it. As a result of the Bill, doctors would not only take steps to avoid pressure from negligence claims—although sometimes those steps are a good thing and we should take more of them—but would move away from any medical practice which has risk attached. All medicine involves some risk, but doctors would not wish to go before the board or to be constantly involved in inquiries, and so would decide to move away from any medicine with a slightly higher risk factor. That would be wrong, partly because no medical practice is entirely without risk, and partly because medical decisions should be made as a result of proper clinical judgments and should not be influenced by other considerations such as boards.

Mr. Couchman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Bill will also militate against innovative procedures and treatment?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is probably so. If a doctor followed that route he would probably end up before the board.

Defensive medicine is a serious matter, which must be considered. There is a lot of loose talk on the subject and as I said earlier, some defensive medicine can be a good thing. For example, the King's Fund report of 1988 showed that much defensive medicine in the United States was concerned with closer monitoring of patients and better record-keeping. I believe that one of the midwives at the press conference given by the hon. Member for Greenwich gave an example of unsatisfactory defensive medicine—the electronic foetal monitor. I was jolly pleased that there was electronic foetal monitoring for all four of my children and I would not wish to do anything to diminish that modern good practice.

I am trying to persuade the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South that the Bill will not make things better. It might do away with existing defensive medicine —whether that is good or bad—and it would introduce a new type.

Mr. Ashley: I appreciate what the Secretary of State is saying and although I do not agree with his objections to the Bill, I know that he puts them forward in good faith. What are his alternatives to the present scandalous situation?

Mr. Waldegrave: Hon. Members will be united in pressing me on that. First, let me finish my explanation of why I think the Bill does not help and why we must therefore look to some other proposals.

My last objection is on grounds of cost. At present, most cases—about 95 per cent—are settled below £100,000, although some headline cases, usually involving children, result in much higher settlements. Surely it is naive to think that if the Bill is enacted, there will not be a very large increase in the number of claims. Unless the awards are extremely small—at the level of criminal injuries compensation type awards of £2,000 or £3,000—most people are bound to go for negligence and, if they are not, the cost will be very great. The BMA says £100 million; the King's Fund used to say £300 million to £400 million and is now saying about £230 million. At any rate, considerable sums will be involved. Nobody really knows, but there would be rapid expansion.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Is not it the case that although people in Sweden and Finland have the right to use the courts, an extremely small percentage exercise that right, and that most are satisfied with what the compensation board offers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I know more about Sweden than about Finland, although I suspect that the arrangements are rather similar. The trouble with an analogy with Sweden is that the scheme represents a small top-up to a very generous disability system, which would be the delight of many hon. Members on both sides of the House if we could afford it. I fear that that is the answer to my hon. Friend's question and we looked into the matter to see why that was so.

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): The Secretary of State is about to explain what he thinks could be put in place of the proposals in the Bill. Many of us who have studied the subject carefully do not accept that just because the present situation is bad—we all accept that it is—we should necessarily adopt the proposals of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). Many of us agree with my right hon. Friend's case, which is that those proposals would make matters worse. I want to make that absolutely clear before we reach what I hope will be my right hon. Friend's constructive proposals for improving the present arrangements.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is the structure of my argument and I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's endorsement of it.

We have problems with each of the matters that the Member for Greenwich and the supporters of the Bill, have, honestly and straightforwardly, sought to address, but which I argue are not addressed effectively in her approach. First, we have a problem with access to health records—a point to which hon. Members have referred. The Access to Health Records Act 1990, introduced by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, comes into action on 1 November and will be of considerable help in terms of enabling justified cases to be brought.

A whole battery of matters—described by the hon. Member for Peckham as a smokescreen, which they are not—arise from the civil justice review started by Lord Hailsham in 1985. Some of the most distinguished experts in the field—for example, Roger Pannone and Lord Griffiths—took part in that review and a large number of the 91 recommendations are either in train or about to be set in train. I shall mention them because, if we are criticising the tort system, we should know what is being done to make it better.

The review looked into three main areas—matching cases to judges, what the lawyers call the cards-on-the-table approach, and changes to reduce delay. New arrangements for the allocation of business between the High Court and the county court will ensure that cases are heard by the appropriate level of judge. Smaller value cases will be heard, for the most part, in the county courts, thereby reserving the High Court for the cases in which it should properly be involved. To achieve that, county courts will be given unlimited jurisdiction and all personal injury claims involving amounts below £50,000 will be required to start in the county court. All cases set down to trial will be scrutinised and decisions will be made on the appropriate forum for trial based on the criteria of substance—the value of the claim and the importance and the complexity of the case. District judges' trial jurisdiction will be increased to £5,000 in line with that of circuit judges and the limit for the automatic reference to arbitration will be increased from £500 to £1,000.

Then there is the so-called cards-on-the-table approach. The aim is for parties to provide each other with information at an early stage of the proceedings to clarify the issues, encourage settlements and shorten trials.

Since last June, a plaintiff with a personal injury claim has been required to provide a medical report and statement quantifying the losses he has suffered, or continues to suffer as a result of his injuries, with his particulars of claim. A further rule change requires the defendant to inform the plaintiff of any facts on which he intends to rely to contest the damages claim. Those rules give each party important information at the outset of proceedings rather than closer to the trial.

From July—this has not been introduced in the debate —parties in defended actions will be required to exchange the statements of witnesses on whose evidence they intend to rely. That will lead to better-informed settlement at an earlier stage of the action. Where a case goes to trial, the

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length of the hearing should be shortened as issues will have been identified and the need for oral evidence reduced.

Changes to reduce delay have been introduced. A period for serving a writ or any other originating process has been reduced from 12 to four months. A defendant will therefore have speedier notice of an action being taken against him and the overall period between issue and trial should be reduced accordingly.

Courts now have more power to split trials—to say that a question of liability be heard in advance of an assessment of damages. Previously, an order for split trials could be made only on application by one of the parties. A further change is the introduction of automatic directions in the county court which provides parties with a timetable of standard directions leading to trial. That means that the parties need not go to the High Court for such a direction.

A county court can now order provisional damages in similar circumstances to the High Court. That allows a plaintiff to receive damages while maintaining his right to claim further damages if his injuries deteriorate.

Since 1985, a number of county court trial centres have been established that can offer continuous hearings. There are 74 such centres and a further four are planned. The Lord Chancellor will next consider steps to allow courts to adopt an interventionist role in ensuring that cases progress.

The House will be aware that, as I have shifted to a legal brief, I am, in a sense, speaking with the permission of the Lord Chancellor. This important battery of changes and reforms are aimed exactly at the target that we should be aiming at.

Mrs. Currie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, following my visit to Sweden in 1987, my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and I, who were then serving at the Department, instead of accepting a no-fault compensation scheme decided to recommend certain changes to the Lord Chancellor's criminal law review committee? I must place it on record that I am delighted to hear the changes that he has announced, particularly the improvement in the county court procedure, which will help all the claims of which he has spoken today.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am delighted that my hon. Friend was involved in the conception of these matters with the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Lester: Surely all these improvements, which are welcome and which we appreciate, do not help where negligence must be proved but where, as a result of advice that it cannot be proved, the person is not given legal aid. All these improvements will not bring the cases that concern many of us to fruition.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes the point that if one has no case in law one will not get legal aid. That is, indeed, the truth. I have attempted to argue that the no-fault scheme does not solve that, but causes the range of separate problems that I have tried to describe.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I must press on. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow is rightly pointing at the clock.

I have something new to put before the House which may be of some interest. The Pearson commission discussed arbitration procedures. More recently, Lord Griffiths proposed that we should offer an arbitration procedure for cases in which negligence must be proven. He suggested a panel of two doctors and a lawyer agreeable to either side. They would work entirely on paper and would have full access to case notes and hospital records. There would be no appeal. The panel would apply the normal principle of negligence under common law.

I am aware that there may be many cases—I am trying to meet a point made by the hon. Member for Greenwich—in which speed and simplicity of solution may be acceptable to the claimant in exchange for losing the ultimate right to bigger damages. I am willing to examine that, although I am not committing the Government today. However, we should have discussions with those who are interested.

One benefit of the debate started by the hon. Member for Greenwich is that attention is now focused on the issues and people are now thinking about them. I should be willing to discuss with groups who are concerned whether such an arbitration prodecure, which we could offer administratively in the national health service and which would not need primary legislation, could provide a second string to the general court bow. The key objective would be to provide quicker, cheaper and simpler avenues for the informal resolution of disputes. I put that suggestion to the House in good faith, but without final commitment. The suggestion needs to be discussed, costed——

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Waldegrave: I must proceed. I apologise to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: On that point.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will give way, but this really is the last time.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: If I heard my right hon. Friend correctly, he was foreshadowing the composition of an arbitration tribunal as being one lawyer and two doctors. Is not it rather difficult to conceive of a decision having to be reached on the legal concept of what constitutes negligence when the majority representation on the panel would not consist of lawyers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that we should now debate that point, suggested by Lord Griffiths. If it is thought to be acceptable by those who are interested, we should consult on it.

We need to know a little more about defensive medicine. We have heard anecdotes and we have seen the study by the King's Fund which seemed to suggest that, in one sense, defensive medicine may be good. We have also seen the evidence published in a recent edition of the *British Medical Journal* which shows that the number of American claims is falling. When we talk about America in the House, we are often out of date about what is happening. There is now a distinct downward turn about which we need to know.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury that it is odd that we do not have proper central information about the matter. We should review the incidence of medical accidents and carry out a proper analysis of claims so that we know what we are talking about. Two research projects are needed before we launch ourselves into uncharted territory. What do we mean by defensive medicine? Is it a good or a bad thing? We must investigate that, as I propose to do with the help of the presidents of the royal colleges. We should have proper evidence about the extent of existing cases.

The hon. Member for Greenwich said—and I have some sympathy with this—that there is something odd about enormous lump sums claims that are based on the principle that the person in question will have the most expensive Harley street treatment. The Bill simply reverses that and says that damages should be awarded on the basis that people have to have NHS treatment. That is not right either. The reason why Aneurin Bevan put such a provision in the original legislation was that he accepted the civil liberties case that one cannot compel someone to have national health service treatment. People must have the option to go elsewhere, especially if they have been damaged by NHS treatment. However, it seems wrong that a person can be given damages on the basis that he will use extensive private medicine, but may not actually do so.

We have discussed the level of damages in relation to the lifetime of the patient concerned. The damages may be too low because, as the hon. Member for Greenwich said, there has been medical progress, or they may be too high. I have had discussions with my noble friend the Lord Chancellor. He has authorised me to tell the House that he has been discussing with the Law Commission the possibility of instituting a new inquiry into personal injury damages which would consider, among other matters, the issue of so-called "structured payments". That is right.

I must advise the House that, even with such measures, the Bill would involve considerable costs for the national health service. The most charitable and positive way to put the matter is to say that the argument that the new principles that we are being asked to endorse are either practical or would improve the position is not proven. I must ask the House to vote against the Bill on Second Reading.

1.4 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the Bill. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) has taken up the cudgel in a worthy cause, which has long been the subject of campaigns by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and numerous others on both sides of the House. The Labour party supports no-fault compensation and I will certainly vote for the Bill's Second Reading.

I agree with everything that was said by the hon. Member for Greenwich, who set out the arguments extremely well. A service must be judged by what happens when things go wrong as well as what happens when they go well. Although the Government pay lip service to patients' rights, patients are treated shamefully when problems arise. The current compensation system adds insult to injury: it is a cruel lottery, in which a very few people receive large sums and most receive nothing—not even an explanation or an apology.

The Secretary of State spoke of a "perception" of unfairness. Patients do not "perceive" that the system is unfair; it is indeed monstrously unfair and the right hon. Gentleman's response completely failed to recognise the scale of the injustice that we shall continue to allow unless we make changes. Even those who win compensation must fight in the courts for up to eight years before they are given their entitlement, and justice delayed is justice denied. That is certainly true for the parents of a child who, having gone into hospital for a routine operation, comes out brain-damaged: those parents must spend eight years of their child's life struggling on the bread line. They need the money at the time when they must give up their jobs and move house, not eight years later, after experiencing all the risks and stress of a legal struggle to prove negligence.

When things go wrong, the odds are stacked against the victim. There will be no compensation at all unless the victim can show that someone was at fault. That is the key point of the Bill, which removes the need to prove negligence and fault. It is very hard to prove that a doctor was negligent. The hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) was right in saying that medicine was an inexact science. It is not just a question of the difficulty of proving fault; it is also difficult to know whether someone was at fault. But we can all tell when something has gone badly wrong. We want a system that compensates people when things have gone badly wrong, without the need to prove negligence.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I am listening to the hon. Lady with interest. Does she believe that, if the need to prove negligence were removed, the result would be more or fewer cases in which negligence was identified for the protection of other patients of a practitioner who might be negligent again? I accept that the Bill would remove the delay involved in proving negligence, but what about those other patients?

Ms. Harman: I intend to deal with questions of accountability and discipline later.

No one would deny that something went badly wrong for the AIDS haemophiliacs who were victims of a terrible mishap. The Secretary of State, who has come here to defend the current legal system, says that it would give them no compensation. That is one of the best arguments for changing the current system of compensation. If the Government's legal advice is right—if, had there been no publicity campaign and if the Government had not used their discretion, those haemophiliacs would have been left with nothing—the system is clearly all wrong.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is rather difficult to show how this Bill would make a difference. The haemophiliacs were offered sums equivalent to the amounts likely to come from the proposed compensation board. They were offered about £28,000 and they refused it as they were free to, just as they would have refused an offer made by the compensation board. They then pursued their case in the courts and they would have a similar right to do that under the Bill. The Bill would make no difference to the haemophiliacs.

Ms. Harman: That is not the case [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] The Government had to make a special discretionary award in response to public pressure. That shows why the system must be changed. Although the

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haemophiliacs were able to mobilise public pressure to bear on the Government, there are thousands of individuals who, because they are alone in suffering the consequences of a particular accident, receive nothing, despite the fact that their personal tragedies may be as grave as that of the haemophiliacs.

What about people who contracted HIV as a result of infected blood transfusions, but who are not haemophiliacs? The haemophiliacs have organised themselves and have been offered compensation because of their pressure on the Government. However, women who contracted HIV when they were given a blood transfusion after child birth do not get compensation. How can we possibly defend a system that allows that to happen?

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The Bill would not change that.

Ms. Harman: Yes it would. As that woman had entered hospital expecting to have a baby, but came out HIV positive, the Bill would ensure that she was entitled to compensation. At the moment she cannot receive that compensation unless she can go to court, live long enough to see the case come to court and finally prove negligence.

Somone cannot begin the battle for compensation through that court unless he or she is poor enough to qualify for legal aid. The Secretary of State did not consider the fact that only 55 per cent. of the population qualifies for legal aid. People cannot begin to go to court and take advantage of the so-called speeded-up procedures, which, by the way, have yet to materialise, unless they are poor enough to qualify for legal aid or rich enough to risk the thousands of pounds involved in legal costs in order to prove negligence.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Harman: No, I will not give way. My experience of the interventions that I have allowed is that I was about to reach the point raised in the intervention and to demolish it. It is not worth giving way.

No system of compensation can be fair when it rules out from the outset most people who should be entitled to compensation and prevents them from even making a claim. How can we justify a system under which more than half the population cannot even begin to make a claim? The Bill's opponents who support the current system should tell us how they can justify that. They have not justified such a system so far.

Most people who claim against the NHS for negligence receive legal aid. However, that does not mean that the only people who suffer accidents in the NHS are those who fall below the legal aid eligibility limit. It simply shows that hardly anyone else can afford to sue. The only people who benefit from the current system are the lawyers. How can we tolerate a system in which for every £100 awarded by the court, £50 to £70 is swallowed up in legal fees? The Secretary of State referred to speeding up the process. I welcome those proposals, but we should bear it in mind that speeding up the process will not change the enormous amount of resources that are diverted away from compensation and into lawyers' pockets. The money will simply end up in their pockets sooner.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Harman: I give way to the hon. Gentleman who is a lawyer.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Lady is making a better point than she realises. As one lawyer to another, I assure her that if the Bill is enacted, we will still do okay, if not better. What the hon. Lady says about legal aid is absolutely right. It must have been her experience, as it has been mine, that once an insurance company backing a defendant realises that the plaintiff does not have legal aid, it simply uses its superior financial position to launch a war of attrition against that plaintiff. The Government may not accept it, but the way of dealing with that within the context of the present system is to do something about legal aid. That would be an intelligent point to put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, though he might not agree to it. However, we do not need this edifice of a Bill which does not begin to identify the real problems.

Ms. Harman: Obviously, I should welcome an announcement by the Secretary of State for Health that we are to have a comprehensive legal aid system, but, even if we had one, and there is no whisper of a suggestion, we would still have the problem of proving negligence.

The Secretary of State argued against the Bill on the ground of cost, but he does not know the cost of the current system. I have repeatedly tabled parliamentary questions to successive Secretaries of State, asking how much is paid in court orders and out-of-court settlements, how much legal fees cost health authorities and how much it costs in legal aid and court time. The Government have not begun to add up the different items of expenditure that lead our present system to be not only terribly unfair but terribly expensive. The Secretary of State says, "Let us not have this scheme because it is more expensive than the current scheme," when he does not know the cost of the current scheme and has not proposed a tariff on the future no-fault scheme. That is pathetic. He should come up with a few answers. He knows that, for years, we have been asking about the cost of the current scheme. He has not done his homework, but he asks us to reject the Bill. We know that the current system is expensive and unfair. Arguments about cost are spurious.

Mr. Higgins: The hon. Lady has announced that the Bill is official Labour party policy. She has, therefore, presumably discussed with the shadow Chancellor an estimate of the cost of the Bill. Will she confirm that he has agreed to her undertaking?

Ms. Harman: We should like a system that takes the resources that are currently wasted in court time and lawyers' fees and devotes them to the victims. That is the whole point of a no-fault scheme. Before we even start talking about whether the scheme is based on no change in resources or whether resources will be added, the current system is monstrously structurally unfair.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady is making an important new commitment. She is saying that the present money, which I suspect is about £70 million, is now to be spread among no-fault compensation claimants. Of course, the hon. Lady will end up with tiny claims for each one.

Ms. Harman: It is a bit much for the Secretary of State to say that, when he has not provided information that his own Department should be able to obtain. We should have

information about how much the current system is costing. It is no good the Secretary of State saying that the problem is that the money would be spread too thinly. He does not even know how much is in the pot. However, we know the percentage in the lawyers' pot and how much is wasted on court time.

Some opponents of the Bill argue that it does not address disciplining the medical profession. The Secretary of State mentioned accountability of the medical profession and giving the patient an explanation or apology. Those issues must be considered. However, the Bill is principally about compensation. For heaven's sake, compensation is also important. It is not fair to say, "Let's not talk about money—people want somebody to say sorry." They want both. Let us not undermine the case for compensation by saying that we can smooth matters with an explanation and by everybody being sorry. Both compensation and an explanation are important.

To reject the Bill because it does not include other measures that we also want would be to cut off our noses to spite our faces. Those who argue in that way do not understand that the adversarial system does not provide accountability, contrary to the Secretary of State's suggestion. The adversarial system is one of the main reasons why everyone clams up and the patient cannot get an explanation or apology.

Mr. Waldegrave: The proposed scheme is still adversarial.

Ms. Harman: The Secretary of State says that the system proposed in the Bill is still adversarial. It is not; it is a no-fault scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: But negligence continues.

Ms. Harman: I shall not be distracted by the Secretary of State's sedentary interventions. If we remove the need to prove negligence, we shall go a long way to removing the need for a cover-up.

Let us quickly run through the Secretary of State's arguments against the Bill. First, he said that the current system has operated for 600 years, although he acknowledged that that is not a terribly good argument. Secondly, he said that it would be the thin end of the wedge and that we would end up in the same position as New Zealand. That is an odd argument. We are dealing with whether we should have no-fault compensation in the NHS. To say that the system will get out of control and that we shall end up covering other matters such as road traffic accidents and goodness knows what else is not a creditable argument.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State said that we need to have a coherent case set before us. We have a coherent case set before us and, what is more, the public support the change. There is no public support for the current system. The case is made outside, even if the Government cannot recognise it.

Fourthly, the Secretary of State said that we needed exemplars and we could not take a leap in the dark. But why did he not offer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) suggested, to set up a no-fault compensation scheme in one regional health authority? People who claim that there has been a mishap could choose whether they wish to go to the board or to court. They could make a contractual agreement to choose the path of no-fault compensation or go to the courts. If the Secretary of State believes that the scheme would not work, why did he not offer to set up an example? We have had no such suggestions. All we have had is, "No, let us chuck the whole thing out."

The Secretary of State said as a criticism—*[Interruption.]* I wish that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) would listen to this point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The Secretary of State was given a fair hearing. I hope that hon. Members will give an equally fair hearing to the Opposition Front Bench speaker.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: It is not a fair speech.

Ms. Harman: The hon. Member for Harrow, West might care to note that I have avoided the cheap party political points which, unfortunately, the Secretary of State directed at my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I intend to continue to do so.

The Secretary of State said that the problem with the Bill was that it would not exclude negligence claims. But that is not the point of the Bill. It does not seek as its principal objective to exclude negligence claims. We seek not to exclude people who cannot prove negligence. The evil is not the negligence claim itself. The evil and the injustice is that people who cannot prove negligence cannot go to court.

The Secretary of State also said that the board would get more money than the victim and that that would be unfair. That is a Committee point on clause 4(8). It is not a point of substance. He also talked about double jeopardy, but all the professions are well used to the idea of civil jeopardy running alongside professional disciplinary action.

The Secretary of State also said that doctors would avoid high-risk areas. It is exactly the other way round.

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Harman: No. I shall press on.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been in the House only seven years but in that time I have never witnessed the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman refuse to give way to the Government Front-Bench spokesman. Is it in order to do that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is one of the conventions of the House, but to whom the hon. Member who has the Floor gives way is entirely a matter for that Member.

Ms. Harman: The Secretary of State spoke for more than half an hour. He has had his opportunity to make his case. I am trying to put my case as quickly as possible.

The Secretary of State said that doctors would avoid high-risk medicine if we introduced a no-fault compensation scheme, but the opposite is true. If one has a fuelled-up, litigation-based system, doctors will get out of high-risk medicine. The same goes for the right hon. Gentleman's argument that such a scheme would militate against innovative medicine. The lesson from the United States and Sweden is that it is the adversarial system which militates against innovative medicine.

The right hon. Gentleman made the interesting suggestion that he should offer some sort of administrative procedure, but that procedure must be on a no-fault basis. If it is not, it hardly takes us any further forward than the

[Ms. Harman]

current system, which requires proof of negligence. The right hon. Gentleman also went through the proposals of his right hon. and learned Friends the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General to speed up civil litigation. Such a change would be welcomed for civil claims, but that does not deal with those who do not qualify for legal aid or who cannot prove negligence.

The beneficial effects of more litigation need to be questioned. The assumption is that, to right the wrong, we should simply have more litigation and cases of patients suing doctors. Consider what has happened in the United States where access to the courts is easier. The Secretary of State said that we should not consider the example of America too hard because things have changed. His assumption was based on anecdotal evidence from friends and such who have been there. We do not need to base our judgment on such evidence, as there is good evidence to prove that the litigious climate under which the doctor in America operates undermines the quality of the medical care available in the United States.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady has given a rather poor performance and she has misrepresented virtually everything I have said. My comments on America were based on evidence produced in the *British Medical Journal* that suggests that the type of practice she has described is declining. We should find out about that.

Ms. Harman: It is absolutely clear—there is no evidence to contradict it—that a high rate of litigation leads to defensive medicine; defensive of the doctor not the patient.

The best way for a doctor to defend himself is to do everything imaginable, tests and treatment, even if that is not in the patient's interest. If he does that, he can say in court that he tried everything. Why risk a normal delivery of a baby when one can perform a caesarean and say that one did everything possible? Why risk a lumpectomy, when one can do a mastectomy and thus tell the court that one at least performed radical surgery? Why wait to see how a problem develops when one can open up a patient to see inside?

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) is completely wrong—defensive medicine is bad medicine. She is wrong to argue that it leads to better medicine. The hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) is right to argue that defensive medicine is bad medicine.

When a doctor decides on a course of treatment we want that decision to be based on medical grounds, not legal ones and not in terms of what courts he or she might face in future. Medicine is a sophisticated and yet inexact science—we do not want a doctor's judgment clouded by thoughts of future litigation.

There is no evidence from America to suggest that doctors are now any more open with their patients, accountable to them or ready with explanations or apologies. They are just as ready to send out a battery of legal letters and to batten down the hatches. If we followed the American example we would encourage a flurry of litigation, which would be disastrous.

Today is a watershed in terms of compensation of the victims of medical negligence. Three choices are available to us. We could keep going with the current system, which is monstrously and cruelly unfair and should not continue. We could encourage more litigation, which would put patients at risk from defensive medicine and pour money into lawyers' pockets. The final option is to change to a no-fault scheme. No-fault compensation is an idea whose time has come. We can sort out the details in Committee; but for the sake of all who are made worse, not better, by the NHS, I hope that the Bill will be given a Second Reading today.

1.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate as a co-sponsor of the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on introducing it so well. Extremely courageously, she has introduced a measure which touches on complex and sensitive issues, and she should be flattered to note that her speech attracted the presence of the Secretary of State and of the Minister for Health.

As the debate has unfolded, a certain amount of common ground has emerged between those who support the principle behind the Bill and those who do not. The consensus is that our present system, in which negligence must be proved, is expensive, risky and full of unacceptable delays. The victim of a medical accident takes on a considerable financial burden when pursuing his case through the courts if he does not qualify for legal aid. There is no certainty about the outcome and the fear always haunts the litigant that he may end up far worse off than if he had not begun the action in the first place.

I believe that many victims would be prepared to settle for far less money if their cases could be settled within a reasonable time and if they could be assured that they did not have to face the trauma of our present tort-based system. Accidents and mishaps will occur even in good health care systems such as the one that we enjoy. Patients who are injured in some way may well settle in some instances for a full explanation of what went wrong if they are satisfied that their cases have been fully investigated.

Legal action has been taken when many patients have been affected. Numbers bring strength and raise public awareness. Pressure mounts in support and eventually common sense prevails, as it did in the case of HIV-infected haemophiliacs. By settling out of court the Government have implicitly accepted the principle of no-fault compensation. What is just for one large group of people is surely just for individuals.

We are fortunate to live at a time when the pharmaceutical industry has produced drugs and medication that have successfully treated many conditions and dramatically improved the length and quality of life of patients. However, we must also recognise that the more straightforward health problems have already been tackled, leaving those which are more complex and difficult to solve—I refer, among others, to various forms of cancer, to arthritis and to Alzheimer's disease. It is obvious to me that, in spite of the best endeavours to develop safe therapeutic treatments and cures, there will be patients who will react adversely and who will suffer as a result of such treatments. There may be a few hard cases who merit compensation even when the risks of possible side effects have been fully explained before treatment. The medical injuries compensation board, recommended as a possible vehicle for such cases, could be used. If the board's decision were rejected, litigation, with all its warts, could still go ahead—people would still have that option.

The two most tricky issues in the context of a no-fault scheme to have emerged during the debate are causation and cost. Although, under the Bill, it would not be necessary to prove that a negligent act or omission was the cause of an injury, it would be necessary to prove a link and that would be extremely difficult in some cases. However, just because it is difficult does not mean that it should not be attempted. At present, the only way forward for the injured party is through the courts. The Bill at least proposes an alternative, which is to be welcomed.

The thorny problem of cost, or possible cost, is no doubt the driving motive behind the Government's positive reaction against the introduction of the Bill. Its provisions do not necessitate any new public money, but, rather, that some of what is already spent on administration and litigation costs should be diverted more constructively to those who have suffered while undergoing NHS treatment. One result that may ensue is that the level of compensation offered by the board will be far too low. The Secretary of State picked up that point. In that case, public pressure will build up once again to improve funding.

We recognise also that growing expectations of what can be achieved will lead to further pressure for additional funding. That should come from the taxpayer who funds the national health service. Other ways, however, could be introduced. For example, the pharmaceutical industry might be encouraged to play a part and to enter into a partnership scheme with the Government. That opportunity should be explored.

I have discussed no-fault compensation with the pharmaceutical companies, in particular with ICI whose pharmaceutical research base is located at Alderley Park in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I received a letter from ICI yesterday in which it said:

"The pharmaceutical industry recognises the inadequacies of the present system and welcomes moves to make it possible for claimants to seek compensation without incurring considerable expense or financial risks. The need to improve the speed at which claims are dealt with is also accepted. We welcome moves to increase the speed of the court process and to assist in the funding of 'class actions' and other initiatives to facilitate greater access to the courts. The Bill highlights most of the concerns expressed by actual or would-be claimants and presents an excellent opportunity for debating this important matter. However, deeper consideration of all the aspects is required."

Many hon. Members will agree with those conclusions.

The problem of a just solution to the really thorny problem of compensation for accidents in the NHS will not disappear in these days of consumerism, when society is more sophisticated and people are more aware of their rights and, I believe, have strong feelings about natural justice.

The Government will eventually have to take action further than that which has been announced this morning. I hope that they do so before they are backed into a corner and forced to act. The Bill has provided an important opportunity for a full debate of this important issue, a debate which I welcome and which will undoubtedly result in instigating progress.

1.37 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said in her closing remarks. She is absolutely right. At the very least, this fine Bill has provided us with the opportunity to debate at considerable length important and deeply worrying matters.

I have a great deal of sympathy for the Bill and its objectives. I am a little diffident about criticising surgeons, given the fact that I face surgery in the very near future. However, I am assured by my wife and friends that Mr. Imrie and his team at Glasgow royal infirmary are pretty good. I can only hope that that is the case. I should not want to inflict a by-election on right hon. and hon. Members.

The quality and nature of the doctor-patient relationship is in many respects utterly unlike any other client-practitioner relationship. It is very different from that which exists, for example, between a lawyer and his or her client. The uniqueness of the doctor-patient relationship was brilliantly illustrated in Dr. Talcott-Parson's essay, written fully 45 years ago. Given the degree of trust that a patient must place in his or her doctor's competence and commitment—be he a general practitioner, consultant surgeon or consultant psychiatrist—the doctor must be subject to a strong degree of accountablility. In all instances, the patient is in a peculiarly vulnerable position, but the same cannot be said of the client of an architect or lawyer.

Despite my remarks about my own future, the accountability of doctors and surgeons is masked by the high degree of conservatism that pervades the medical profession and numerous defence mechanisms. Whereas some claim that lawyers are the most conservative profession in the United Kingdom, at least an equal case could be made for the innate conservatism of the medical profession.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) mentioned a number of distressing cases that had been brought to his attention. I want to cite the experience of a lady in my constituency who underwent a bilateral mastectomy. Because of the trust she placed in her surgeon, she agreed to undergo an operation that is viewed by others in the medical profession as being quite unneeded. That lady's husband wrote to me:

"The effects that this has had on my family could never be explained in a letter. The result of this terrible ordeal was that my wife has never left the house again, and she has got so bad with nerves and depression that I was forced to give up my employment, which was a very good staff position."

He was compelled to take that action so that he could look after his clinically distressed wife. His letter continues:

"The reason that I set out to try to gain compensation for my wife was through a chance conversation that my wife's sister had with a surgeon in Canada. On hearing what had been done to my wife, he was absolutely shocked. He said that the statement regarding the high cancer risk was wrong, and also that the manner in which she was treated at Conniesburn hospital was a disgrace."

He goes on to say that his wife's lawyer

"has been trying to establish a case for her, for a period of two years now, and all we have to show for our effort is the medical report from a Professor who is recognised as an expert in that field, in which he states that there was no medical reason why Bylateral Mastectomy should have taken place."

Finally he says:

"My wife has been a prisoner in her own home for ten years now, it would make you cry to hear her say that she would love to walk in the rain ... No amount of compensation could replace what they have destroyed, but it would at least improve the quality of her life."

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

When people seek compensation they are not out for vengeance but for the means to improve the quality of a life that has been damaged.

I do not necessarily blame the surgeon in my constituent's case, but I blame the obduracy and stubbornness of officials of the Argyll and Clyde health board in prolonging the distress of this couple and of their family. I have been told that in such cases the doctors' medical insurance representatives and health board officials—in the Scottish experience—engage in discussions about areas of responsibility, which prolongs matters to a needless and distressing degree. That is totally unacceptable.

I listened closely to what the Secretary of State said earlier when he promised that such cases would be speeded up in England and Wales. Presumably identical procedures will be introduced in Scotland.

As the hon. Member for Congleton stressed a few moments ago, when people have suffered terrible injuries whether physical or psychological, as in the case of my constituent, we need to distinguish between the sad but unintended consequences of justifiable risk-taking by surgeons, and injuries which are inflicted by careless, incompetent surgeons.

I have had a number of conversations with my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who was perhaps one of the foremost neurosurgeons in western Europe before he came to the House. He told me that, especially in the field of neurosurgery, one is engaged in risk-taking when undertaking certain operations. He referred to the case of a young motor cyclist who had suffered brain damage in a traffic accident, and he told me that neurosurgeons have to take risks. I suggest that surgeons who work in such an incredibly complicated field must be allowed to take justifiable risks.

These days some people talk about "just" wars and in the context of this debate—which I welcome, as did the hon. Member for Congleton—we can talk about "just" operations and justifiable risks which surgeons must be encouraged to take. I do not want our surgery to be affected by the litigiousness that now affects American surgery. Last Christmas my wife met a Scot who now works in New York as a geriatrician. His insurance for working with the elderly in a geriatric hospital there is $2·5 million. Neurosurgeons and other doctors working in delicate fields have to be allowed to take justifiable risks. Having said that, we need a system under which the careless and incompetent surgeon can be disciplined.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman is on the wrong track if he regards the Bill as a way of protecting patients against the careless and the incompetent. Whatever happens, the Bill must not become a charlatans' charter.

Dr. Godman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows me well enough to know that I would not in any way—directly or indirectly—support a charlatans' charter. In his usual courteous way, the hon. Gentleman has been listening intently to what I have said. He will remember that I said earlier that if nothing else, the fine Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) has enabled us to debate these matters, although I hope that the Bill goes further and I shall be voting for it this afternoon.

I have some reservations, however, We must somehow distinguish between the unintended but sad consequences of justifiable risk-taking and the sloppy theatre behaviour of the careless or incompetent surgeon. Careless or incompetent surgeons who have inflicted injury on people should be disciplined. The Argyll and Clyde health board recently dismissed a surgeon for alleged incompetence, which had led, in the view of the sheriff conducting the fatal accident inquiry, to the death of a constituent of mine.

The Secretary of State may challenge me on this, but in my view the United Kingdom has sloppy disciplinary procedures for dealing with such cases of incompetence. I am not a medical man; I have an authentic doctorate. But it seems to me that consultants who are suspended from the national health service can continue to practise privately. Is not that the case? Moreover, such consultants may be suspended on full salary for what may seem to be many months.

To ensure accountability, we must have a fair and humane disciplinary procedure which at the same time protects the decent surgeon, as opposed to the one who is guilty—or is found guilty by his peers—of incompetence or careless surgery. If we can do that, the trust that is the cornerstone of the unique client-practitioner relationship will be enhanced to a considerable extent.

The Government have a responsibility. It is right that we should leave the establishment of disciplinary procedures to the professions. In Scotland, we have a Law Society—presumably there is one south of the border—which can discipline its members by way of its disciplinary committees. Nevertheless, the Government have a role to play in ensuring that such effective disciplinary procedures are established in the near future.

As I said, I have some reservations about the Bill itself. I am worried that it may persuade some surgeons to go in for safe surgery—some have used the term "defensive surgery". Surgeons may be unwilling to take risks and that would be a great shame. It is certainly worth giving the Bill its Second Reading. Some of the problems in its structure can then be eliminated in Committee. I suspect that that is a forlorn hope, but we ought, now and again, to debate these important matters in the House.

1.54 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this important debate.

I should declare an interest. The Register of Members' Interests shows that I advise a pharmaceutical company in Kent. I have not spoken to it about the Bill, and it may be one of the companies that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) said support her Bill, or at least the concept of it.

I congratulate the hon. Member on introducing the Bill. It has given us a good opportunity to discuss a highly controversial subject. There seems to be a growing swell of opinion in favour of no-fault compensation schemes, probably principally because of the haemophiliacs and the contaminated blood products, about which we all know and which I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on settling so honourably.

Whenever there is clinical treatment that involves invasion of the body by surgery or by medication, there is a risk. Inevitably, there are risks that are not always

foreseeable. The risk of post-operative problems from surgery or adverse side-effects from medication is brought to the attention of the patient by a responsible doctor prior to commencing the treatment. Generally, the patient will accept that risk.

Not all side-effects are known or predictable. The hon. Member for Greenwich was less than forthcoming about the fact that novel procedures can have quite unexpected side-effects. One patient's side-effect is another patient's mishap. The more serious the disease, the more heroic the intervention is likely to be and the more unpredictable the outcome.

I am worried about clause 2(5)(d), which refers to the suffering of significant pain, disability, harm or distress. I do not believe that that is drawn tightly enough. My wife suffered two episodes of cancer, one of which resulted in unpleasant surgery, from which she has been left in significant pain. The alternatives to undergoing that surgery are known to all of us. The pain would undoubtedly fall within the definition in clause 2, but I would not think of pursuing that, because everything was done to help my wife recover from the condition from which she was suffering.

My primary concern is that the Bill will militate against medical advance. We have seen enormous progress in recent years. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) rightly instanced neurosurgery, and I would add the magic of microsurgery, laser treatment and the chemotherapy treatment of leukaemia. Not all patients survived or benefited from the development of those novel treatments, but the alternatives were usually grave or fatal. One need only review the transplant programme, from which my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) benefited so recently, to appreciate that the prognosis for early transplantees was poor indeed, partly due to their grave condition when they underwent their operation and partly due to the as yet imperfect techniques that were used to treat them. Many of those people or their relatives might have had a case under the Bill. The Bill would lead to safe surgery, safe medicine and safe treatment.

A further worry is that the Bill could act as a substantial block to the research and development programmes of pharmaceutical companies. I am sure that no hon. Member would wish to see them cease to probe the frontiers of their science and to try to develop treatments for the more intractable diseases that are left untreated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) suggested.

One of the weaknesses of the Bill is that the board might pursue a claim—having compensated the patient whose treatment has been adjudged to be unsatisfactory—against a pharmaceutical company or against another supplier to the national health service. The hon. Member for Greenwich was incorrect to suggest that the Bill was not intended to enable the board to pursue a claim against those working in the national health service. Part II of schedule 2 refers to

"pursuing any legal claim which has passed to the Board (whether that claim is against the National Health Service or any part of it, or against a supplier to or for the National Health Service or to or for any part of it)".

The Bill allows for the possibility of the board following up a negligence case against an employee of the NHS.

My principal objection to the Bill and the reason why I will vote against it is that it would be detrimental to patients because it would lead to a diminution in innovation and in the techniques and procedures that are at the frontiers of the skills of the people treating us.

2 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on the Bill, which contains an idea whose time has come. The correct principle is that one must first help the victims and then argue at leisure about who is to blame.

The present position cannot be allowed to continue. I have heard the reservations of many Conservative Members and of the Secretary of State. I agree that the medical profession must be accountable, like any other profession, for its mistakes. However, it is not accountable under the existing system in most cases. The person who is responsible may be dead, may have retired or may have moved before he has been called to account. In the case that I am about to relate, he had moved to Saudi Arabia. With all due respect to the Secretary of State, who comes from the merciful wing of his party, as I come from the reforming wing of mine, I heard nothing in his speech that would cause me to change my mind about the Bill.

The case that came to my surgery some years ago and caused me to feel strongly on the issue involved a gentleman called Kenneth Stanness. In May 1983, he went into hospital for a minor operation on his back and emerged seriously brain damaged. That had a devastating effect on his wife and family who have been caring for him since.

In November 1987, four years after the event, I wrote to the chief executive of the health authority. I said:

"I am shocked to learn that 4 years after the event the Health Authority is stoutly refusing to admit liability or to make any offer that would help to relieve the burden . . . for this unfortunate woman."

I received a wholly unsatisfactory reply. The district general manager said:

"I have reviewed the file and discussed the situation with the Authority's Solicitors, and I regret that it is not possible at this stage to add very much . . . The legal process is taking its course."

Indeed, it was—at a snail's pace.

A year later, another case within the same health authority came to my attention. It involved a gentleman called Mr. Blackburn who, after a long and tortuous legal process which lasted for 12 years, received damages of £491,000, despite the fact that his original solicitors—he had to change his solicitors three times, solicitors' incompetence being a common feature of such cases—had initially advised him to accept £2,000. That case seemed relevant to the case of Mr. Stanness because the award of the damages from the same health authority was accompanied by expressions of regret about how terrible it was that 12 years had elapsed before jusice had been done and how we must find some way—which was unspecified—of avoiding that happening again.

Stimulated by that response and thinking that it might cause the health authority to get a move on in the case of Mr. Stanness, I wrote to the district general manager of the health authority on 8 August 1988:

"I am prompted to write to you again following reports in last week's newspapers of an award made to Mr. Keith Blackburn who suffered a similar accident to that of Mr. Stanness, 12 years ago in Newcastle General Hospital. You will also have seen in last week's newspapers expressions of surprise and regret that it took 12 years before the Health Authority was obliged to face up to its responsibilities.

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

My purpose in again raising with you the case of Mr. Stanness is to suggest that you ought to review his case in the light of the award to Mr. Blackburn. The alternative seems to be that the Stanness case will be allowed to drift on at the cost of continuing distress to Mrs. Stanness and the spending of large sums of public money on lawyers' fees, which would be better directed towards alleviating the catastrophe that has overtaken Mr. and Mrs. Stanness. If you thought it would be worthwhile I would be glad to meet and discuss the matter".

After a bit of prompting, I received another bland letter:

"Whilst I appreciate your concern about this case, I am afraid that in view of the legal position, I am not in a position to provide any information beyond that already forwarded to you, and I would find myself unable to discuss the case with you either, for reasons which I am sure you will understand . . . I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful".

Another year or so went by; there was another change of lawyers—the third, I believe—and, five years after the event, the health authority finally admitted liability. As it was obvious to everyone concerned that it was liable, it might as well have done so many years earlier. A further six or seven months elapsed before, some time last year, the first preliminary offer of damages was made. Believe it or not, the case is still being contested: I believe that it will go to court in March 1991, eight years after the event. During those eight years that woman has been through hell, while no regret has been expressed or assistance offered by those who, for whatever reason and regardless of whether negligence occurred, brought disaster on her husband.

That is the case that set the issue so forcefully at the forefront of my mind. I shall support the Second Reading because I have heard nothing from those who object to the Bill that suggests that there is a better way of dealing with the problem. I accept that the way suggested in the Bill may be imperfect, but I have heard no serious alternative that might have brought relief to Mrs. Stanness.

2.6 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): We are coming to the end of a long and interesting debate. I join other hon. Members in expressing my appreciation to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who has raised an important subject and dealt with it with great sensitivity. It is, in fact, a very sensitive issue. About four of my constituents have been involved in medical accidents and I have noticed the blight cast on not only their lives but those of their relatives, especially when fatalities have been involved.

I think that everyone agrees that the present position is unsatisfactory. I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who argued that, because of the patient-doctor relationship, many patients would find a confrontation extremely difficult to deal with, even if it was a possibility. It is also entirely wrong that legal costs should amount to between 50 and 70 per cent. of claims.

The position is not assisted by the medical profession's unique unwillingness to accept the modern demands of accountability imposed on them by patients. *The Daily Telegraph* told us yesterday:

"The Medical Profession has been defensive to the point of obstructiveness."

The Association of Victims of Medical Accidents, for which I have considerable regard, says that members of the profession try to surround themselves with an aura of inviolability, and we have heard what the Pearson commission had to say about the current methods of redressing wrongs in such instances.

I was pleased to hear from the Secretary of State about the reforms that the Government have introduced in regard to access to medical records, specialist solicitors' lists, medical audit, inquiry on structural costs and, perhaps most important, a survey of the incidence of medical accidents: the AVMA has been asking for such a survey for a long time.

It is not entirely satisfactory to rely on the courts for the resolution of those disputes. As has been said, some people are not eligible for legal aid and they miss out on the opportunity to go to court. I dislike the idea of having the legal aid board as the effective arbiter in many medical disputes which, in effect, is the position.

However, I believe that there is a semi-contractual relationship between the taxpayer and the medical profession. The taxpayer seems to be saying more and more that the medical profession should be responsible for its actions. That lack of accountability in no-fault compensation causes me problems with regard to the Bill.

There is little doubt that the present system of accountability is completely inadequate. Professor Margaret Stacey, emeritus professor of sociology at Warwick university and author of "The Patient Voice and the GMC" has said:

"The profession's leaders operate and support a system of regulation which neither ensures the continuing competence of practitioners nor adequately disciplines the incompetent."

It is obvious that the statutory procedures for taking action against incompetent doctors, whether through the General Medical Council, the family health services authorities or the general practitioner complaints procedures are not sufficient.

I asked the FHSA in my county how it had dealt with cases involving death since 1988. I discovered that there had been 13 cases dealing with death since 1988, only two of which were withdrawn by the complainants. In all those cases only one doctor was severely reprimanded. No action was taken in the other cases. It is clear that the present system of accountability is unacceptable.

Unfortunately I believe that the no-fault compensation scheme leaves effectively unanswered all the questions about the accountability of the medical profession. I am not saying that the patients are not interested in compensation. Rather, they want to know why things have gone wrong and who is responsible. They want an apology and an explanation. The code of practice, which the proposed board will draw up, will take an enormous amount on trust. A cast-iron case has not been made that that code of practice will ensure that investigations are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that proper investigations are carried out under the Bill.

Clause 3 does not define mishap and causation is too vague. Both those issues are vital in distinguishing between legitimate clinical judgment and negligence and incompetence.

For some time the BMA has been calling for a compensation fund to be accompanied by some form of independent medical inspectorate. It is curious that we have a health and safety inspectorate for our factories and an independent education inspectorate to monitor the way in which our children are taught. We have a social services inspectorate to deal with many of the life-and-death issues

in which the social services departments are involved. We also have a police inspectorate, but we do not have a similar body to maintain standards of competence in what is possibly the most delicate area—the national health service.

A national health inspectorate would be one way of ensuring that many of the complaints that are presently ignored or have to proceed through an exceptionally expensive, long and perhaps ultimately unsuccessful legal procedure are adequately dealt with. If the Government can move their thinking towards an independent inspectorate that will absorb many of the existing methods of redressing complaints within the national health service, we would do the cause of the victims of medical accidents a great deal of good.

2.14 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Lady have the leave of the House to speak again?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mrs. Barnes: All hon. Members will agree that this has been a stimulating and sensitively handled debate. It is an issue to which there are no easy answers and I did not think that I had solved every problem. I am reassured by the genuine and deep-rooted acceptance that the current position is seriously flawed and that something radical must be done about it. I am reassured also by the consensus that, in an ideal world, all those with needs or disabilities of any kind would be adequately compensated without having to demonstrate cause of negligence. However, as I made abundantly clear, my Bill restricts itself to the national health service and does not tackle other issues that may cause similar problems in other aspects of our community. That is quite deliberate. That national health service, as I said, accounts for 15 per cent. of public sector expenditure—£27 billion. It is our duty to make sure that that money is properly spent and that those who receive the benefits of the national health service are receiving the right protections and safeguards.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Lady mentioned the amount that is spent on the national health service. Perhaps she will draw attention to the amount that is spent through social security on the disabled, which is currently about £8·3 billion. If we are not to have some of the measures that she is advocating the alternative is more money for social security so that the safety net for those who get nothing will be raised.

Mrs. Barnes: I accept that point, but I shall not be led down that path at the moment.

I listened with care to what the Secretary of State said as he poured scorn on several aspects of my Bill. I waited with growing interest to see whether his alternative proposals would offer a much more radical, long-lasting and, perhaps, better solution to the problems than my Bill can. I was disappointed. I welcomed the measures that he made known to the House—they can only help. However, I am confident that in one, two or three years' time, the House will have to face this issue again. The Secretary of State's measures will not address the severity of the problems that we are facing and they will do nothing to address some of the major cases, such as that of the haemophiliacs, which have brought the attention of hon. Members and others to this matter.

Several hon. Members have said that, under my proposals, the haemophiliacs would not have received such a settlement. That is entirely due to the Secretary of State. If he considered it appropriate, in such exceptional circumstances he could make additional moneys available to the board because a terrible wrong had been done to innocent people. That would be entirely within his power. The same public clamour that forced the Government to make that settlement without a no-fault scheme would force a Government with a no-fault scheme to consider such a case.

I was concerned to hear the Secretary of State say that many of the credible and creditable organisations and bodies that have put forward the principle of no-fault compensation have not been able to agree on any one scheme—that perhaps it is inherently flawed, perhaps there is no right scheme and perhaps there is something wrong. I take serious issue with that. In recent weeks, I have listened with great care to all the bodies that expressed an interest in this matter and I have been convinced of their sincerity. Many of them have worked in this area for several years and have become committed to a particular type of no-fault compensation scheme that they believe is right for their side of the argument. The Association for Victims of Medical Accidents sees the matter entirely from the patients' view. It has a degree of what I describe as the punitive approach to the medical profession. In some of its documents it implies that compensation is less important than obtaining explanations and, perhaps, making retribution.

I have not dodged the issue of accountability, but I have also listened to people on the other side of the argument such as the doctors, represented by the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Physicians, and the obstetricians and gynaecologists who are at the sharp end of the argument. They have difficult decisions to make. They should not have to do so constantly looking over their shoulders at what may happen in a court of law. They wish to build a trusting relationship and most of them are entirely honourable. It would be inappropriate to introduce a measure that could bring a medical practitioner to his knees through one error in an exemplary career.

My Bill is an attempt to walk the tightrope between the various interested bodies that have rightly addressed the matter for many more years that I have. I sincerely hoped that if I did not get the Bill quite right and improvements could have been made, the House, with its long experience and many hon. Members who have been involved in the matter for many years, would be given the opportunity to improve the Bill in Committee. I was asking for the opportunity to take a stage further the principle of no-fault compensation. All the various bodies involved tend to agree that that should be done. Some have been of that opinion for many years, while others have come to that conclusion only recently in the face of the changing pattern and level of litigation in this country.

There is a growing consensus among almost all the royal colleges, many patients' and consumers' groups and many legal bodies that the current position is becoming almost unworkable. I was no less surprised than other hon. Members that my proposals drew less hostility than

[Mrs. Barnes]

expected from the drug companies, which recognise that the current procedure is not working well and perhaps does them more harm than good.

I ask the House seriously to consider its decision today. We are talking about a system which involves miserable lengths of time, large sums of money for those who are able to obtain compensation—because they are either entitled to legal aid or are wealthy—and confrontation. Although I accept that the Secretary of State made a genuine attempt to address some of those issues within the legal system, I believe that he will do little to make matters substantially better. There may be some trimming here and there, but the increased number of cases entering the system will overtake any such measures.

When I drew up the Bill I had regard to the Bill previously presented to the House by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). I discussed with her some of the pitfalls in her Bill and deliberately avoided them. In her Bill many of the details on which the House could have argued long and hard were spelt out, such as whether someone who had a catheter in place for two years should be eligible for compensation and how infections should be treated. In the limited time available to me to draw up a Bill that would give the House an opportunity to take the debate further, I felt that I should concentrate on the basic principles. I thought that it was appropriate to allow the board, to which we would give great power and in which we would put great trust, to lay down some of the detailed regulations that would come back to the Secretary of State and the House for approval. After all, the board would include experts. I see this Bill as an enabling one. I did not intend to dot every "i" and to cross every "t". Obviously such matters can be finalised and decided on in Committee.

If we turn our back on this issue today and say no to the possibility of no-fault compensation, we shall persist with the court-based approach. Therefore, the misery of many individuals, about whom we shall never know except as individual constituents, will continue. The next scandal that rocks the House will leave us answering our constituents' question, "Why did you not do something about it last time?"

We have seen the misery caused by Thalidomide and Opren and the problems of the haemophiliacs. There will be similar cases and whatever improvements may result from the Secretary of State's proposals, they will not tackle that. We will be back to the public clamour and the media campaign and people will be forced to take action after deaths have occurred and widespread misery has been caused.

A no-fault compensation scheme may be forced on the House in the future following European legislation. The Secretary of State argued that there are no foreign examples on which we can base our scheme, but if we cannot be innovators and lead the world on this vital issue, it is deplorable.

There are compensation schemes in Sweden, although admittedly they are built upon much more generous social security benefits as it is a wealthier country than the United Kingdom. There are also schemes in some American states —for example, Virginia, where schemes specifically relate to maternity claims. There must be a solution for this country. It is not enough to say that no one else has got it right or that no one body has the right formula, so we should set it to one side.

I strongly urge the House not to turn its back on this opportunity to tackle medical negligence in an entirely different, non-confrontational, fair and affordable way.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 81, Noes 193.

Division No. 56] **[2.27 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Body, Sir Richard
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Michael, Alun
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Ann Winterton and
Mr. Tom Clarke.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina

Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (PUBLICITY FOR AUDITORS' REPORTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

AIRCRAFT (NOISE RESTRICTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 1 March.

ROAD TRAFFIC (RANDOM BREATH TESTING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Not printed.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

DOMESTIC SMOKE ALARMS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 8 February.

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL

Motion made,

That it be an Instruction to Standing Committee B that it have power to amend the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill so as to make, in relation to the whole of the United Kingdom, provision for and in connection with the exercise of investigation powers by persons other than constables.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Take-away Food Shops

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.40 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the subject of planning controls over hot food take-away shops, with particular reference to Welling—which is the second largest town in my south-east London constituency.

I appreciate that such shops meet an obvious demand and are certainly popular with many people—particularly younger persons and parents of small children. My own two sons hold them in high regard. They are well suited to the pace of modern life, and create wealth and employment locally.

However, as many right hon. and hon. Members know from constituency experience, there is a downside. In the words of Bexleyheath's chief superintendent:

"A number of such establishments in this borough have in the past attracted police attention for the following reasons. Complaints of noise by local residents. A cause of litter in the immediate vicinity. Obstruction to footways outside by groups of youths. Complaints of rowdyism, particularly in the late evening. Obstruction of vehicles parked outside."

The Government are well aware of the litter problem, which reached unacceptable levels years ago. Some types of commercial operation, such as take-away restaurants, generate a disproportionate volume of litter. Firms such as McDonalds are well aware of their public responsibilities. Their experienced managers do their best, but the litter problem remains.

Although the town of Bexleyheath has benefited from a vast new shopping centre, there is local concern, which I share, about the future of Welling. It must hold on to the attractiveness and vitality of a prime shopping area.

In past years, Bexley borough council was slow to recognise that too many hot-food shops were opening in the Welling area. Local people became increasingly vocal and I began to receive a large number of letters and complaints. I pay tribute to Darwin and Faraday residents association, which for many years has carried out a classic campaign to alert those in authority to an ever-increasing problem.

Bexley council—with all-party support, which is not easy to achieve at a local level—started doing what it could within existing planning controls, but it hit a major snag. I quote from my letter dated 15 November 1989 to my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for the Environment:

"I wrote in July 1988 to the then Minister of Housing and Planning concerning the approach being adopted by the Department of the Environment towards local planning decisions. I regret to say that since then the position in my own constituency has gone from bad to worse.

I refer in particular to the almost regular practice of the Department to overthrow the decisions of our local planning authority—decisions they make as elected representatives of my constituents and normally with the whole-hearted support of my constituents. Of course I understand that the Government rightly wishes to reduce the amount of bureaucracy in the planning system and allow more firms and individuals to do what they want, but we both know a proper balance needs to be struck and regretfully the evidence in Bexley is that this is not happening."

There are now 21 hot food take-away shops in Welling which seems to me, as a layman, to be an extraordinarily large number for one comparatively small town. Of those, three were allowed on appeal in 1985, 1989 and last year.

My correspondence with the Department became increasingly frustrating. Bureaucratic replies, laced with planning jargon become meaningless at constituency level, as we all know. Junior Ministers were insensitive to what was becoming a major local issue for me.

On 8 December 1989 I received a letter signed by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan). The nub of that letter was that the question whether any service is sufficiently represented in a locality is a matter of commercial judgment, and is not a matter for planning consideration and that the planning system should not be used to regulate the supply and demand for commercial services.

I submit that that approach is barmy. I like to think that under the Department's new and distinguished management it has been or is being altered. Frankly, I have no idea what the market for hot food take-away shops is in an area like Welling. South-east London has a high population density and a highly mobile and comparatively wealthy population. Welling is on a major road and there are plenty of bus stops. Would that market take 30 or 40 of these shops before some started falling off? It would be ridiculous to allow more shops to try their hand and to fight for their share of that crowded market, while the whole area continues to suffer in the process.

I stress to my hon. Friend the Minister that this matter should not be left solely to market forces. Proper planning by the local elected authority should be encouraged in the interests of the inhabitants of my constituency and the local environment. I look forward to hearing exactly what a local authority can do in such circumstances to meet the strongly expressed feelings of the local residents. At present many of my constituents are losing faith in the planning system. They see Whitehall overruling Bexley far too often.

I am proud of what we have achieved as a country in terms of local planning to protect and improve our surroundings. Whenever I go to the United States I am appalled at the unchecked linear development that has been allowed to take place, and I am grateful to Britain's far-sighted post-war planners. Ministers tell me that when they deal with appeals, the inspectors are concerned that what is proposed is in the public interest. That entails weighing the legitimate worries of local residents about the possible effects of development on their environment, against arguments in favour of proposals. My constituents do not agree that their interests are being properly looked after and they do not believe that the proper balance is being achieved. They have appealed to me, as their local Member of Parliament, and I have therefore initiated this brief debate. I appeal to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for his support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and his hon. Friends appear to be holding a committee meeting. Perhaps they would prefer to do so outside the Chamber.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I find it odd that you should make such remarks about my hon. Friends and me, given that about 10 Conservative Members persisted in interrupting the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on the important Bill dealing with no-fault compensation, which the Tories have just ransacked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking up the valuable time of the hon. Member who has the Adjournment debate.

Mr. Skinner: You started it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he ought not to engage in sedentary conversations——

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will respond to the request of the Chair.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) on winning the opportunity to raise this important subject. He is a strong and effective champion of the interests of his constituents and I hope that he will remain their champion and representative for many years to come.

I regret any insensitivity that may have been shown by any of my predecessors—of whom there have been quite a large number in the past few months—in the wording of replies to my hon. Friend. We shall certainly renew and redouble our efforts to avoid recourse to bureaucratic jargon, which may, indeed, be incomprehensible by the time it reaches Welling.

Hot food take-away shops have been around in a variety of guises for generations. Perhaps the most familiar are fish and chip shops. My hon. Friend acknowledged that most of us patronise such outlets from time to time, and those of us with families no doubt visit them rather more frequently than we might if the choice were left entirely to us. Nevertheless, proposals to establish new outlets can still generate local controversy. The Government's planning policies in respect of such establishments are sometimes misunderstood and I am pleased to have the oportunity to set them out in a way that I hope will be unambiguous.

I entirely understand why individual establishments and proposals for additional establishments give rise to concern such as that expressed by my hon. Friend on behalf of his constituents. It is most important that the operators of such outlets should ensure that they minimise any problems of litter, noise or disturbance, and those are all factors which local planning authorities can take into account in deciding whether to grant planning permission. I am encouraged by the fact that many operators are adopting very responsible policies towards the communities in which they function.

For more than 40 years, the development control system has distinguished between the use of land for catering establishments such as restaurants and take-aways, and other uses of land for outlets such as shops. There is a world of difference, in both a cultural and a culinary sense, between a traditional pie-and-mash or tripe shop, and a modern fast-food restaurant. But there is less difference in land-use planning terms. I refer, for example, to the effects on local amenities and the environment and to the pedestrian and vehicular traffic that they generate. At present, the planning system allows changes of use as between most catering trade uses to take place without planning permission, but planning permission must be obtained before a catering use can be introduced for the first time. I believe that that is the right basis for planning control.

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 is often regarded as the present-day villain of the piece as regards take-aways. Nevertheless, it has considerable merits as a piece of deregulation in relation to planning matters. My hon. Friend seemed ready to acknowledge that there is a great deal of concern about the fact that the planning process involves considerable delays for people making applications and for people involved in appeals. Of the very large number of applications dealt with each year, almost 30,000 go to appeal. The order performs a helpful service in reducing what, if it were not in force, would be an additional burden of extra appeals. It means that more manpower resources are available to deal with other aspects of the planning system, including enforcement.

For the first time, the order groups together restaurants, take-aways, cafes and other catering trade uses in a single food and drink use class. In the order, that use class is known as A3. It frees from planning control changes between those uses. It broke new ground and it was always likely, therefore, to be regarded with mistrust and suspicion in some quarters.

The approach adopted in the order, however, was pragmatic as well as deregulatory. It recognised that the catering trade has undergone a transformation in the past decade. The traditional demarcation between public houses and restaurants and between restaurants and take-aways has become blurred. The order allows the catering trade to adapt to changing trends and demands with greater speed and certainty, in premises where potential environmental nuisances such as smell, traffic and parking have already been accepted. It also relieves local planning authorities of the burden of determining whether planning permission would be required for a change of use from a public house to a wine bar or from a bistro to a brasserie.

I should stress that the order did not remove or reduce local planning authorities' power to control the proliferation of premises used by the catering trade. Planning permission is still invariably required to erect new premises, or to change the use of existing non-A3 premises to A3 uses. Each such application must be decided on its merits by the local planning authority, according to a time-honoured formula of

"having regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations."

Let us suppose that an area is already well served or, as my hon. Friend and his constituents might claim, over-supplied—21 seems quite a large number for a town the size that he mentioned—with restaurants and take-aways, possibly for historical reasons. Let us further suppose that, individually or collectively, the establishments are creating environmental difficulties. It will be difficult for a local authority to secure a reduction in their overall number under planning legislation other than by granting planning permission for suitable alternative uses as and when the opportunity arises.

There are powers for local authorities to make orders to discontinue particular uses of land, but such orders can involve the local planning authority in a liability to pay compensation for the losss of existing use rights. I recognise, therefore, that the use of such powers will be

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

contemplated only in exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, local authorities have discretion to refuse planning permission for any additional take-away outlets.

Local authorities also have several options available outside the scope of planning control to alleviate some of the problems associated with restaurants and take-ways. These include the introduction of parking restrictions and, in Greater London, the power to require hot-food shops to close at midnight. Those powers will be augmented by the street litter control notice provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, under which a local authority will be able to place a duty on the proprietors of premises such as take-aways to keep their frontages litter free.

To safeguard against planning refusals being overturned on appeal, local planning authorities must buttress their decisions with sound reasons based on criteria that are relevant to the land use planning system. Typically, such reasons will relate to the anticipated adverse effects on the local environment and amenity. Such effects can include an increase in traffic and parking, noise and disturbance, particularly if this seems likely to take place in the evening or to affect a residential area.

My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on or discuss the merits of individual decisions, but I assure him that appeals are decided only after the most careful assessment of all material factors. My hon. Friend said that three of the 21 establishments had resulted from appeal.

An additional way in which a local planning authority can defend a refusal of planning permission on appeal is by basing its decision on a relevant policy in an adopted local plan. This leads me to another issue that appears to have caused some misunderstanding. In 1985—before the introduction of the A3 use class—my Department issued guidance on "Service Uses in Shopping Areas" in development control policy note 11. That document made it clear that, in land-use planning terms, the adoption by local planning authorities of policies designed to maintain or to strengthen the retail element of shopping areas can be justified. Indeed, I understand that the London borough of Bexley included such a policy in the Bexley borough plan, which was adopted in February 1985. This means that it is acceptable for local planning authorities, in the light of local circumstances, to decide whether they should resist changes to the mix of retail and non-retail uses in a particular shopping area. Thus, if the conversion of a shop to a take-away were proposed in an area in which such a policy applied, the desirability of giving effect to such a policy could provide an important pillar for a refusal of planning permission.

However, what the Government could not support in the context of such a policy would be decisions that discriminated against a particular form of non-retail use. I cannot accept that local authorities' power to regulate development should go so far as to set ceilings for the number of particular outlets in a particular area. This does not mean that we are simply content to allow a completely market-led free-for-all. I recognise the force of my hon. Friend's point. It means that we are committed to a development control system in which each decision is considered carefully on its own merits. Such decisions will be based on an assessment of the likely effect that the development proposal will have on the locality and will not be arbitrarily pre-ordained on the basis of a rigid system of rationing for specific forms of development.

I am sure that my hon. Friend and others will agree that it would be inappropriate for Bexley council—or my Department—simply to set a limit for the number of pizza parlours or burger bars that could become established in Welling. I am sure that those of my hon. Friend's constitutents who patronise such establishments would not wish to have their choice curtailed in such a way. Equally, I hope that they will accept that if the continued viability of a retail shopping area or the amenity of a locality were judged to be issues raised by any proposal to create a new A3 outlet, the council has a duty to ensure in the wider public interest that such considerations are taken into account in determining whether planning permission should be granted for that outlet. The same duty would apply to the Secretary of State and to his inspectors when deciding appeals.

If, in reaching its decision, the local planning authority judges that a particular use or uses within the A3 use class would have adverse effects on the environment or on amenity, not susceptible to other control, it need not necessarily refuse planning permission outright. An alternative approach would be to grant planning permission subject to a condition restricting future changes of use which, by virtue of the Use Classes Order 1987, would not otherwise require a further grant of planning permission.

Independent research has recently been carried out on behalf of my Department into the effects of the Use Classes Order 1987. That research has revealed that local planning authorities' use of such conditions is relatively commonplace when granting planning permission for A3 uses. The Government are still considering the implications of the researchers' findings and we will announce our conclusions in due course. However, the apparent willingness of local authorities to grant conditional planning permission for A3 uses seems to demonstrate that applications from the catering trade represent a demand that should be met, where that can be achieved without compromising those areas of concern that the development control system is designed to safeguard, and about which my hon. Friend has spoken.

I hope that I have been able to provide some enlightenment and encouragement to my hon. Friend on the Government's planning policies in this sometimes contentious area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 21 January 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Access to Dwellings

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General how many kinds of orders or warrants give courts, the police, bailiffs or solicitors access to private dwellings without permission of the resident.

The Attorney-General: There are no orders or warrants which grant the courts access to private dwellings without the permission of the resident other than through a bailiff. There are four situations in which bailiffs have such powers. First, a bailiff may force re-entry to premises from which he has been forcibly ejected when levying distress. Secondly a bailiff may force an entry to premises to which goods have been removed in order to avoid distress. Thirdly, a bailiff may force entry to premises in order to give possession to the plaintiff. Fourthly, a bailiff may force entry in order to execute a warrant of restitution.

A solicitor may gain access to a private dwelling without permission only when attending a defendant's premises with a plaintiff in order to execute an Anton Piller order.

Initial examination has identified some 21 categories of offence in relation to which the police have specific statutory powers of entry to private dwellings without permission of the resident. These are listed alphabetically in the table.

Categories of offence in relation to which the police have powers of entry to private dwellings without consent

By warrant or court order

Animals
Children
Copyright
Criminal Damage
Drugs
Entertainments
Explosives
Forgery and Fraud
Gaming
Immigration
Incitement to Racial Hatred
Liquor Licensing
Mental Health
National Security and Terrorism
Obscenity and Indecency
Offensive Weapons
Poaching
Scrap Metal
Sexual Offences
Stolen Goods

Without warrant or court order

Road Traffic

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to ensure that there is no misuse of Anton Piller orders.

The Attorney-General: Since the Court of Appeal laid down the preconditions for the granting of such orders in Piller KG *v.* Manufacturing Processes (1976), case law has prescribed numerous safeguards in the granting and execution of Anton Piller orders.

An additional safeguard recommended by the civil justice review is that the power to grant Anton Piller orders should, subject to certain exceptions, be reserved to High Court judges. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is presently considering the terms in which this should be included in regulations, a draft of which is presently being consulted upon.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General how many Anton Piller orders have been issued in each year since they came into existence.

The Attorney-General: The Government do not maintain statistics on the number of Anton Piller orders issued by the courts.

Women Judges

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to equalise the number of women circuit judges, recorders and assistant recorders; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has repeatedly made clear his wish to appoint more women to judicial office. Steps have been taken to make this widely known, and thus to encourage more suitably qualified women to put themselves forward for consideration. The composition of the bench at any one time is, however, dependent on the composition of the legal profession in the age groups with the necessary experience to be suitable. At the moment, there are relatively few women in the legal profession in the appropriate age groups with the right experience. It is expected that the number will increase significantly over the next 10 years, and that this will result in more women judges, recorders and assistant recorders.

ENERGY

Oil Well Fires

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what percentage of the crude oil is converted into soot when an oil well burns out of control;

(2) when crude oil burns out of control in an oil well fire, what proportion of the oil is converted into soot; and how effective the atomic carbon so released is at absorbing sunlight.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the note produced by the Meteorological Office on the possible environmental impacts of burning oil wells in Kuwait, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

The worst case scenario considered in the Meteorological Office's note is based on the assumption that 6 per cent. of the oil would be converted to black smoke. The note, however, records that the amount of smoke could be significantly less. The effectiveness of a smoke plume in absorbing sunlight depends on the details of combustion and dispersal.

North Sea Standby Vessels

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the future safety regime he plans for North sea standby vessels.

Mr. Moynihan: In his report on the Piper Alpha disaster, Lord Cullen made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the quality of standby vessels, including a need for new regulations. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear to the House in his statement of 12 November, the Government accept all of Lord Cullen's recommendations, and work is in progress to implement them as quickly as possible.

Oil Production

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the normal level of oil production offshore for (i) Kuwait, (ii) Saudi Arabia and (iii) in total for all the oil-producing states in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Moynihan: The normal approximate output levels of offshore oil production are:

(i) Kuwait: 0·024 million barrels/day.
(ii) Saudi Arabia (incl. neutral zone): 2 million barrels/day.
(iii) Total Persian Gulf states: 4 million barrels/day.

The data are largely from the "Arab Oil and Gas Directory 1990".

Public Utilities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the benefit that could be achieved for energy consumers through closer collaboration between electricity suppliers and other utilities, particularly the water companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for the companies concerned, within the relevant statutory and regulatory provisions.

Tidal Barrages

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what help he will give to promote the construction of tidal barrages in the Severn and the Mersey estuaries.

Mr. Moynihan: As part of our on-going research programme on renewable energy technologies, my Department is making funds available to assist feasibility studies for tidal energy barrages on the Severn and Mersey estuaries. As I announced on 30 August 1990, £456,000 is to be contributed to new environmental studies by the Severn Tidal Power Group. Also, up to £1·5 million is being made available for a third phase of feasibility studies by the Mersey Barrage Company.

In regard to the Mersey barrage, a ministerial committee has been established under my chairmanship with the following terms of reference and departmental membership:

To consider the proposed Mersey barrage and, in particular, to address key issues such as:

the value of the project
the role of non-energy costs and benefits
the evaluation of the effects of barrage construction and operation on regional development and other legitimate interests.

To explore ways in which the various government departments which might be involved in or affected by such a project can best co-operate in order to ensure that all the necessary information is brought to bear in the most effective way during such consideration.

Departmental Membership:

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Employment
Energy
Environment
Social Security
Trade and Industry
Transport
Treasury
Welsh Office

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Home Leave)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(f)* female prisoners were granted home leave each year from 1986 to 1989; and how many of these failed to return on time.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information for 1986 is not available. The information available for 1987-89 should be regarded as approximate, since it is collected on the basis of overall numbers at individual establishments. Establishments holding more than one type of offender—that is, male, female and young offenders—do not provide returns that distinguish between them.

The figures relate to the number of leaves taken. Many prisoners are entitled to more than one leave a year, so the number of individuals will therefore be lower.

The available information is as follows:

	Male establishments		*Female establishments*		*Young offender institutions*	
	Granted	*Failed to return on time*	*Granted*	*Failed to return on time*	*Granted*	*Failed to return on time*
1987	6,095	330	226	20	1,458	56
1988	10,472	712	435	28	1,559	69
1989	14,611	1,092	411	14	2,611	129

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on home leave and temporary release for prisoners in 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90, respectively.

Mrs. Rumbold: Figures collected centrally do not distinguish between expenditure on home leave and other forms of temporary release. The table details payments made to prisoners on all forms of temporary release including home leave. The principal costs of the scheme derive from payments for travel and subsistence for the inmates concerned.

	£
1987-88	286,928
1988-89	423,303
1989-90	548,293

Drug Misuse

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of people convicted of drug misuse in the area governed by the Seaham and Peterlee magistrates courts by year since 1985.

Mr. John Patten: The number of persons convicted by the Peterlee and Seaham—now the Easington, and Houghton-le-Spring division of Sunderland metropolitan district—magistrates' courts in each year since 1985 for offences relating to drug misuse is given in the table.

	Number of persons
1985	7
1986	5
1987	3
1988	5
1989	9

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield, (Mr. Sheerman) on 19 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *203-4*, whether he will *(a)* list all the items of data to be held on the new police national computer that will be linked to those data that relate to driver licensing *(b)* list all the items of data to be held on the new police national computer that will be linked to those data that relate to driver records, *(c)* indicate whether there will be any free text fields or warning signals associated with any driver licensing or driver records, *(d)* indicate the anticipated number of driver licensing and driver records held, *(e)* indicate the estimated number of access to these records as compared with routine vehicle checks and *(f)* describe the circumstances when it is anticipated that these new records will be used by police;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield on 19 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *203-4*, whether he received advice from, or had meetings with, the Data Protection Registrar before deciding on the nature of the closer links between the new police national computer and the DVLA in Swansea.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The proposal to provide information relating to driver records and licensing on PNC2 is still at the planning stage. The items of data that would be held have yet to be determined. To meet the needs identified in the road traffic law review, the following information would need to be kept:

Name and address
Date of birth
Driver number
Licence issue number
Type of licence
Categories of vehicles covered and expiry dates
Whether duplicate licence has been issued
Any current disqualification
Total number of penalty points

It is proposed to keep the information as a separate PNC file and not to include free text fields or warning signals. I understand that there are some 46 million driver licence records. It is not possible to estimate with any accuracy the number of inquiries which may be made of the file, but it is reasonable to assume that it could be between 50 to 100 per cent. of vehicle accesses. About 21 million vehicle inquiries are currently made each year.

The application will enable a police officer to establish immediately whether a person has a valid licence to drive and the appropriateness of the fixed penalty procedures when an offence has been committed.

I recognise the need to keep the Data Protection Registrar informed of our proposals for PNC2. A meeting was held last July with his staff to discuss PNC2 developments and we shall consult further as our plans for new applications proceed.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A range of security measures have been developed to protect computers and the data that they process, according to the assessed risk to each system. These include physical, personnel and electronic controls as well as guidance to staff on secure handling procedures. It is not Government policy to disclose details of these measures, since to do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and thereby reduce the effectiveness of the measures. The measures are kept under review.

Broadcasting

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role, and its activities to date, of the broadcasting unit in his Department in relation to the crisis in the Gulf.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The broadcasting department of the Home Office has no specific role in relation to the crisis in the Gulf.

Taylor Report

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards implementation of the proposals of the Taylor report.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) on 14 January at column *375*.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current strength of the traffic co-ordination and support branch of the Metropolitan police (TO14), and the current number of traffic wardens in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 31 December 1990 the strength of TO14 branch of the Metropolitan police was 120 police officers, 36 civil staff and 31 vehicle removal officers; and the strength of the traffic warden service was 1,416.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are expected to be accommodated at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh when it opens in April 1991; and what is the planned maximum number of inmates.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is expected that Belmarsh prison will hold about 180 prisoners when it opens in April 1991 and will gradually take more prisoners until it reaches its operating capacity of 841 in September.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the posts of Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh have so far been filled in *(a)* unified prison grades and *(b)* for civilian workers.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of unified prison grades in posts on 15 January 1991 was 75 and the number of civilian staff was 97 full time and one part time.

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make the application form to vote by post or proxy due to physical incapacity No. RPF 7B available in Braille;

(2) if he will list the languages in which his Department's form RPF 7B for application to vote by post or proxy in respect of physical incapacity is available.

Mrs. Rumbold: Form RPF 7B is available in English and Welsh language versions. There are no plans to make it available in Braille.

Feltham Young Offenders Institution

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he expects the provision of education in the remand wing of Feltham young offenders institution to be restored in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Minister of State the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold).

Mrs. Rumbold: Education classes in the remand wing at Feltham young offenders institution are currently being prevented by a dispute between management and the local branch of the Prison Officers Association over staffing levels. A meeting will take place next month at which I hope the dispute will be resolved.

I visited Feltham on 8 January as part of a programme of visits I am undertaking to prison service establishments.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is now in a position to place a copy of the Home Office's report on the private security industry in the Library; and if he will outline the Government's response to this.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are considering a range of options for improving the regulation of the private security industry. When consideration of this issue has been completed we will decide what circulation to give to the working group's report.

Charities

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he is making with the Government's review of charity law, following the reports of the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's proposals for the reform of charity law are set out in the White Paper "Charities: A framework for the Future" which was presented to Parliament on 16 May 1989. The Government hope to introduce legislation to give effect to these proposals within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Immigration Rules

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make changes in the immigration rules.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has reviewed the immigration arrangements currently in force in relation to Iraqi nationals in the light of the outbreak of hostilities in the Gulf. He has concluded that it is now necessary to suspend the normal immigration facilities for Iraqis wishing to come to the United Kingdom or to extend their stay, and to extend the requirement on Iraqis remaining here to register with the police. The following changes took effect on Saturday, 19 January.

A "Statement of Changes in the Immigration Rules" was laid before Parliament on 18 January and this will provide for applications by Iraqi nationals for visas, for leave to enter, whether or not a visa has previously been issued, or for extensions of stay to be refused. Discretion exists to grant applications outside the immigration rules, but this will be exercised only sparingly in compassionate circumstances where we are satisfied that no threat to national security is involved.

The concession under which Iraqi nationals are permitted to pass through the United Kingdom as airside transit passengers without a visa is being withdrawn.

My right hon. Friend has made an order requiring all Iraqi nationals who are in the United Kingdom on limited leave to register with the police if they are not already subject to such a requirement.

These measures will not affect Iraqi nationals who possess British citizenship or who are nationals of European Community member states exercising treaty rights in the United Kingdom.

THE ARTS

Museum Collections, Derbyshire

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he intends to intervene in the proposed sale of items from the collections of Derbyshire county council museums and galleries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no statutory powers in relation to museums and galleries run by local authorities.

The use of any proceeds from the disposal of items from the collection of a museum for purposes other than the purchase of additional items, is contrary to the codes of practice of the Museums Association. I understand that the Museums Association has warned Derbyshire county council that its membership of the association will be reconsidered if the proposed sale goes ahead. The county has also been warned that its eligibility for awards through the Museums and Galleries Commission would be at risk in this event. I hope very much that Derbyshire county council will take notice of the strong protests aroused by its proposed action and rescind its intention to sell these items.

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art during the half year ended 31 December 1990, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was eventually exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; whether he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply, including that relating to the outcome in individual cases.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accepted my recommendation, following consideration by the reviewing committee on the export of works of art, to defer making for a specified period a decision on an export licence application in respect of the items listed. Details of the items on which decisions were deferred were given in press notices issued at the time the Secretary of State decided to accept the recommendation, and a further press notice will now be issued.

Description of Item	*Valuation £*	*Outcome*
A pair of George II armchairs by William and John Linnell	200,700	Purchased by the Victoria and Albert
The Badminton Cabinet	8,697,000	Decision deferred until 17 March 1991
Drawing by Bomberg "Family bereavement"	54,000	Application withdrawn by applicant
Painting by Ribera "Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew"	2,787,500	Export licence granted
Two Bronze trumpet fibulas	1,560	Purchased by Leeds city council
Red enamel brooch	815	Purchased by the British museum

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half year ended 31 December 1990 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax or capital transfer tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed in the matter of allocation by testators or executors; whether he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax or capital transfer tax; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries in the event of any information being given in his reply which has not previously been announced.

Mr. Renton: The information that the hon. Gentleman requests is as follows:

Item	*To whom allocated*	*Condition/Wishes expressed*
"Farm Cart with Horse in Harness" by Constable	Ipswich borough council	Wish to go to Ipswich museum
Kirckman Harpsichord	Manchester city council, for use and display at Heaton Hall	Wish to go to the Fitzwilliam museum
"Richmond pres Londres" by Corot	Orleans House, Richmond	Wish to go to a London gallery

Items awaiting allocation	*Date of acceptance*
Collection of works by and relating to John Piper	31 October 1990
"Girl at a window, Little Rachel" by W. R. Sickert	15 November 1990

It has not been considered worthwhile, in this instance, to issue a press notice since the only material contained in this answer which has not been the subject of previous press notices is the detailing of wishes expressed with each offer.

Welsh National Opera

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make it his policy to ensure that Welsh National Opera is funded securely for the future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no direct involvement in decisions relating to levels of public subsidy for individual arts organisations. The Welsh National Opera is funded jointly by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Welsh Arts Council. I understand that the funding bodies and WNO are currently working together constructively to find a mutually acceptable solution to the company's present financial difficulties. I very much hope that there will be a successful outcome.

Museums and Galleries (Attendances)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1990 reported by national museums and galleries in England for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions, but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1989.

Mr. Renton: The estimated number of visitors during 1990 to the 11 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible are as follows:

	Estimated Attendance in 1990	Percentage Change from 1989
British Museum	5,079,472	+8·4
Imperial War Museum	1,257,277	+4·4
National Gallery	3,682,233	+9·3
National Maritime Museum	595,353	+40·5
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1,292,590	−4·2
National Portrait Gallery	602,069	−3·7
Natural History Museum	1,459,100	−5·8
Science Museum	2,683,349	+2·9
Tate Gallery	2,210,254	+13·9
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,356,944	−1·6
Wallace Collection	135,866	+5·3
Total	20,354,507	+5·7

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in the 1991-92 financial year of introducing a reduced rate tax band of *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 15 per cent. on the first £2,000 of taxable income; and what would be the effect on the net income of (i) a single person, (ii) a couple where the wife is not working and (iii) a couple where the wife is working and paying tax.

Mr. Maude: The direct revenue cost of a reduced rate of 20 per cent. on the first £2,000 of taxable income in 1991-92 would be about £2·4 billion in a full year. A reduced rate of 15 per cent. of the same band of taxable income would cost about £4·8 billion in a full year. These estimates are based on a projection of the 1988-89 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. The increases in income after tax of the different types of family would be as follows:

Increase in income after tax[1] *£ per week*

	(a) Reduced rate of 20 per cent. on first £2,000 of taxable income	(b) Reduced rate of 15 per cent. on first £2,000 of taxable income
Family type		
(i) Single person	1·92	3·85
(ii) Married couple with wife not working	1·92	3·85
(iii) Married couple with wife working and paying tax	3·85	7·69

[1] Illustrative calculations assume taxpayers have enough income to use the whole of the reduced rate band; in line (ii) the wife's income is assumed to be less than the personal allowance.

Fraud

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money Her Majesty's Government estimate has been lost in the latest year for which comparable figures are available as a result of fraudulent tax claims and fraudulent social security claims; and how many persons have been successfully prosecuted, respectively, in Scotland.

Mr. Maude: Reliable estimates are not available of the cost of fraudulent tax or social security claims.

In the year 1989-90 in Scotland the number of persons successfully prosecuted by the Inland Revenue in respect of false accounts or returns, and false claims to personal allowances, deductions for expenses or repayments, was three.

In the year 1989-90 in Scotland the number of persons successfully prosecuted by the Department of Social Security for social security fraud was 906.

Incomes

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the income per capita in Northern Ireland as a percentage of the United Kingdom level in the latest available year;

(2) what was the income per capita in Wales as a percentage of the United Kingdom level in the latest available year;

(3) what was the income per capita in Scotland as a percentage of the United Kingdom level in the latest available year;

(4) what was the income per capita in each of the regions of England as a percentage of the United Kingdom level in the latest available year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest estimates of personal and household income for the regions of the United Kingdom are provisional estimates for 1988. They were published in "Regional Accounts 1988 Part 2" in the April 1990 issue of *Economic Trends*—page 115 onwards. The data are also held in computer readable form in the Library of the House. Estimates consistent with the 1990 national accounts and the recently issued regional GDP figures will be published in the April 1991 issue of *Economic Trends*.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the gross domestic product of the United Kingdom is attributable to London and the south-east.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest estimates of regional gross domestic product were published in "Regional Accounts 1989 Part 1" in the November 1990 issue of *Economic Trends* (page 98 onwards). This includes provisional estimates for 1989 which suggest that 36·6 per cent. of the gross domestic product of the United Kingdom, excluding the continental shelf, is attributable to London and the south-east. Regional GDP is estimated at factor cost and at current prices using the income approach.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide figures for 1979 and 1987 showing, on an equivalent income basis, the proportion of each of the following household types in each quintile of *(a)* original and *(b)* post-tax income, as defined in the annual articles in *Economic Trends* on the effects of taxes and benefits, (i) one adult with children, (ii) two adults with children, (iii) non-retired without children and (iv) retired.

Mr. Maude: The information is not available in the precise form requested because there is now only one

method of ranking used to produce the annual article in *Economic Trends*, and this uses equivalised disposable income. The figures for 1987 are the first to use this new methodology, and the data for 1979 have been reworked on to the new basis. The figures are given in the table.

Percentages of household types within each quintile group of equivalised disposable income, 1979 and 1987

Household type	Quintile groups of equivalised disposable income: Bottom	2nd	3rd	4th	Top	All households
1979						
1 adult with children	6	3	2	2	1	3
2 adults with children	16	32	43	33	18	28
Non-retired without children	11	23	33	51	73	38
Retired	65	33	10	4	4	23
3 or more adults with children	2	8	12	10	5	8
	100	100	100	100	100	100
1987						
1 adult with children	9	6	2	1	—	4
2 adults with children	19	21	33	29	20	24
Non-retired without children	19	22	38	52	70	40
Retired	48	46	18	11	8	26
3 or more adults with children	5	5	8	7	3	5
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Central Statistical Office based on Family Expenditure Survey.

House Purchase (VAT)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to ensure there is no discrimination as far as value-added tax is concerned between those people buying a purpose-built holiday home and those purchasing from current housing stock a dwelling for use as a second home; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There is, and should be, a distinction drawn for VAT purposes between second homes which are capable of being occupied throughout the year—and which may be treated as principal private residences—and purpose-built holiday homes which the buyers cannot occupy lawfully throughout the year or as their principal private residences. There is no reason why the latter should not be taxed under a broad based consumption tax such as VAT when other forms of holiday accommodation are taxed. Failure to do so would conflict with European Community law.

Privatisation

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total income from privatisation sales since 1979.

Mr. Maude: Net privatisation proceeds up to 1989-90 amount to some £28½ billion.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasions since May 1979 he, or his predecessor, has met *(a)* the President of Iraq, *(b)* the Foreign Minister of Iraq and *(c)* the Defence Minister of Iraq; and what matters were discussed.

The Prime Minister: My predecessor met the then Foreign Minister of Iraq, Dr. Sa'dun Hammadi, on 9 March 1981. She also met Mr. Tariq Aziz in May 1985 when he came as a member of an Arab League delegation and again on 4 December 1985. A number of regional issues were discussed.

Ministers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers have visited Japan since 1983.

The Prime Minister: The following Ministers have visited Japan since 1983:

1983

18 to 23 January
Mr. Jenkin, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

5 to 12 March
Mr. Blaker, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

1984

26 to 27 May
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

26 September to 6 October
Mr. Morrison, Minister of State, Department of Employment

1 to 13 October
Mr. Edwards, Secretary of State for Wales

6 to 9 October
Mr. Luce, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

28 October to 2 November
Mr. Butcher, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

1985

15 to 19 April
Mr. Tebbit, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

2 to 9 June
Mr. Pattie, Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.

2 to 14 June
Mr. Brooke, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education and Science.

10 to 14 September
Mr. Hunt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Energy.

1 to 5 October
Mr. Ridley, Secretary of State for Transport.

25 October to 2 November
Mr. Younger, Secretary of State for Scotland.

1986
11 to 19 March
Mr. Edwards, Secretary of State for Wales.
1 to 5 April
Mr. Howard, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
4 to 6 May (Tokyo Economic Summit)
Mrs. Thatcher, Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Mr. Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer.
24 to 30 May
Mr. Trippier, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment.
22 July
Mr. Raison, Minister for Overseas Development.
17 to 20 September
Mr. Spicer, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Transport.
23 to 25 September
Mr. Morrison, Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
13 to 16 October
Lord Trefgarne, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

24 to 28 November
Mr. Channon, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.
1987
10 to 12 January
Mr. Clarke, Paymaster-General, Department of Employment.
16 to 19 January
Mrs. Rumbold, Minister of State, Department of Education and Science.
16 to 19 January
Mr. Needham, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office.
5 to 8 April
Mr. Howard, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
20 to 24 April
Mr. Shaw, Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
17 to 21 October
Mr. Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland
15 to 20 November
Mr. Walker, Secretary of State for Wales

1988
9 to 13 January
Mr. Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
10 to 17 March
Lord Young, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.
5 to 8 July
Mr. Patten, Minister for Overseas Development.
27 August to 2 September
Mr. Bottomley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Transport.
12 to 16 September
Mr. MacGregor, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.
30 September to 1 October
Mr. Morrison, Minister of State, Department of Energy.
1 to 8 October
Mr. Roberts, Minister of State, Welsh Office.
15 to 18 October
Lord Glenarthur, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
23 to 26 October
Mr. King, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
12 to 19 November
Mr. Lang, Minister of State, Scottish Office.

1989
14 to 19 January
Mr. Maude, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
23 to 25 February
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
2 to 6 April
Mr. Moore, Secretary of State for Social Security.
18 to 24 May
Lord Young, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.
13 to 21 June
Mr. Lee, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment.
10 to 14 September
Mr. Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland.
19 to 21 September
Mrs. Thatcher, Prime Minister.
24 September to 4 October
Mr. Jackson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education and Science.
27 to 30 September
Mr. Walker, Secretary of State for Wales.
5 to 7 October
Mr. Howard, Minister of State, Department of the Environment.
15 to 18 November
Lord Trefgarne, Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry.
26 November to 2 December
Lord Sanderson, Minister of State, Scottish Office.
4 to 8 December
Mr. Needham, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office.

1990
10 to 15 May
Mr. Ridley, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.
24 to 29 June
Mr. Eggar, Minister of State, Department of Employment.
15 to 18 July
Mrs. Chalker, Minister for Overseas Development.
9 to 11 September
Mr. Hurd, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
11 to 14 September
Mr. Howard, Secretary of State for Employment.
15 to 19 September
Mr. Patten, Secretary of State for the Environment.
28 September to 4 October
Mr. Mellor, Minister for the Arts.
2 to 7 November
Mr. Lang, Minister of State, Scottish Office.
13 to 22 November
Mr. Hunt, Secretary of State for Wales.
25 November to 1 December
Mr. Needham, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office.
9 to 12 December
Lord Caithness, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

1991
17 to 19 January
Mr. Lilley, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will review all official papers on the Kincora boys' home;

(2) if he will make a statement on the Kincora boys' home affair;

(3) if he will institute a new inquiry into events surrounding the Kincora boys' home.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received since taking office to the present date, concerning the Kincora boys' home.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to obtain for the library of No. 10 Downing street a copy of the BBC2 "Public Eye" programme entitled "Kincora—An MI5 Connection" transmitted in June last year; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Security and Intelligence Services

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to review the activities of the security and intelligence services.

The Prime Minister: I intend to follow the practice of my predecessors by not commenting on these matters.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the staff counsellor for the security and intelligence services; and what issues were discussed.

The Prime Minister: The arrangements for the staff counsellor for the security and intelligence services were set out by my predecessor in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) on 2 November 1987 at column *512*. It is not the practice to give details about how he discharges his responsibilities.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the allegations made by Mr. Colin Wallace about events involving the security services and forces in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. John McCarthy

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received since his appointment calling on the Government to press for the release of John McCarthy; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We continue to receive a great many representations on behalf of John McCarthy. The plight of our citizens held hostage in Lebanon is high among our concerns and our efforts to secure their release remain unremitting. Hostage releases last year showed that Iran can exert decisive influence. The Iranians have undertaken publicly to use their humanitarian influence to achieve them to live up to this assurance. We are also urging Syria to continue its strenuous efforts to secure the release of western, including British, hostages in Lebanon.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Further Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the percentage of the further education budget delegated to colleges by each local education authority.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not held centrally.

School Pupils

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is available to his Department on the number of pupils in each local education authority who receive education in schools maintained, or formerly maintained, by another local education authority.

Mr. Fallon: Every year each local education authority submits to the Department a return listing pupils who belong to its area but who are attending local authority-maintained or grant-maintained schools outside that area on the third Thursday in January. The pupil numbers as at January 1990 for each LEA are listed in the table.

The number of pupils belonging to local education authorities attending schools maintained or formerly maintained by other local education authorities

	Number
City of London	116
Camden	3,475
Greenwich	2,364
Hackney	5,207
Hammersmith	2,470
Islington	4,221
Kensington	2,377
Lambeth	8,045
Lewisham	4,197
Southwark	3,954
Tower Hamlet	2,930
Wandsworth	3,887
Westminster	2,751
Barking	949
Barnet	2,315
Bexley	1,586
Brent	6,102
Bromley	1,579
Croydon	2,847
Ealing	3,197
Enfield	2,024
Haringey	3,509
Harrow	2,258
Havering	978
Hillingdon	1,308
Hounslow	2,300
Kingston	1,279
Merton	1,926
Newham	1,078
Redbridge	1,952
Richmond	1,112
Sutton	1,861
Waltham Forest	1,517
Birmingham	3,630
Coventry	314
Dudley	1,130
Sandwell	1,331
Solihull	785
Walsall	773
Wolverhampton	1,193
Knowsley	2,680
Liverpool	1,329
St. Helens	1,391

	Number
Sefton	466
Wirral	270
Bolton	918
Bury	1,540
Manchester	3,046
Oldham	752
Rochdale	1,217
Salford	1,053
Stockport	881
Tameside	884
Trafford	1,505
Wigan	1,378
Barnsley	614
Doncaster	410
Rotherham	255
Sheffield	734
Bradford	2,324
Calderdale	543
Kirklees	689
Leeds	916
Wakefield	299
Gateshead	609
Newcastle	1,020
North Tyne	790
South Tyne	226
Sunderland	429
Isles of Scilly	4
Avon	676
Bedfordshire	936
Berkshire	2,228
Buckinghamshire	4,612
Cambridge	1,220
Cheshire	1,235
Cleveland	134
Cornwall	351
Cumbria	132
Derbyshire	1,536
Devon	713
Dorset	328
Durham	827
East Sussex	1,244
Essex	3,538
Gloucestershire	500
Hampshire	2,597
Hereford and Worcs	2,151
Hertfordshire	1,272
Humberside	554
Isle of Wight	18
Kent	1,074
Lancashire	2,638
Leicester	667
Lincolnshire	1,889
Norfolk	1,023
North Yorks	1,291
Northants	384
Northumberland	455
Nottinghamshire	1,069
Oxfordshire	551
Shropshire	561
Somerset	1,044
Staffordshire	2,095
Suffolk	588
Surrey	4,395
Warwickshire	1,264
West Sussex	1,184
Wiltshire	1,278

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have *(a)* become committed to hold a ballot on grant-maintained status, *(b)* voted yes and (i) had the proposal approved, (ii) had the proposal rejected and (iii) await determination of the proposal and *(c)* voted no; how many in each category were the subject of (1) closure or (2) reorganisation proposals; and whether, for schools in categories *(b)* (ii) and *(c)*, the proposals have been approved or rejected.

Mr. Eggar: A total of 179 schools have been or are committed to holding a ballot on GM status. There have been 98 votes in favour, 33 votes against and 51 results are still awaited. Four schools have embarked on the process twice and one application lapsed.

Of the schools that voted in favour of applying for GM status, 58 applications have been approved and the Secretary of State is minded to approve a further two. Twelve have been rejected and 16 have yet to be decided. Applications from a further 10 schools are awaited.

The number of schools in each category which have been the subject of closure or reorganisation proposals were:

		Number subject to closure/reorganisation proposals
GM proposals:		
approved	58	18
minded to approve	2	1
rejected	12	11
not yet decided	16	4
still to be published	10	3
Voted no	33	19
Lapsed applications	1	1
Ballot result pending	51	5
Total number of embarkations	183	62

Eight of the 11 reorganisation proposals involving schools with rejected GM applications were eventually approved. Eleven of the 19 reorganisation proposals involving schools who voted not to apply for GM status were approved.

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Eggar: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in this Department. Estimates are however made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold—currently £250. However, following an interdepartmental exercise in 1972 an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs such as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Eggar: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Student Loans

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the projected amount to be repaid by a student taking out the maximum available loan *(a)* studying in London and *(b)* studying outside London to the Student Loans Company by a graduate who was living away from the parental home, does not defer repayments, and was on a (i) three-year and (ii) four-year course commencing October 1990;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of monthly repayments over the standard five-year repayment period to be repaid by a student taking out the maximum available loan *(a)* studying in London and *(b)* studying outside London to the Student Loans Company by a graduate who was living away from the parental home, does not defer repayments, and was on a (i) three-year and (ii) four-year course commencing October 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Borrowers repay in real terms the amount that they borrowed. The loan outstanding at the start of repayment depends on the maximum loan available in successive academic years; on the rates of indexation applicable during the period of the loan, and on when in each academic year the borrower draws down the loan. These factors also affect the size of the monthly repayments, as does the length of the standard repayment period.

The table shows, to the nearest pound, the expected loan outstanding at the start of repayment and the monthly cash instalments due in each case. The figures take account of the GDP deflator assumptions given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement. They assume that the borrowers draw down the loan at the start of each academic year and that repayments will take place over five years, starting in April 1994 where the course has lasted three years and in April 1995 where it had lasted four years. The Government will review annually the length of the standard repayment period, in order to ensure that repayments are manageable.

	Loan outstanding at start of repayment £	*Monthly instalment* £
(a) Borrower who had studied in London and lived away from home:		
(i) On a three-year course	1,967	36
(ii) On a four-year course	3,010	55
(a) Borrower who had studied outside London and lived away from home:		
(i) On a three-year course	1,741	32
(ii) On a four-year course	2,638	48

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a detailed breakdown of how his Department arrived at the student loans repayment figures given in table 3 of the leaflet "Loans for Students: A brief guide 1990-91" published in August 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures in table 3 are purely illustrative. They provide for borrowers to repay in real terms the amount that they borrow.

The table shows the expected monthly cash instalments due from a student who starts a course in the academic year 1990-91 and borrows the maximum loan facility each year at the "elsewhere" rate of loan. It assumes that the value of full year student support from grant and loan will increase by 6 per cent. in the academic year 1991-92, by 3·5 per cent. in the academic year 1992-93 and by 3 per cent. thereafter.

The loan outstanding at the start of repayment is the sum of the maximum loan facilities for the relevant years plus an amount resulting from the indexation of the amount outstanding each year. The indexation rates are assumed to be 9·8 per cent. for the year beginning 1 September 1990, 4·75 per cent. for the year beginning 1 September 1991, 3·5 per cent. for the year beginning 1 September 1992 and 3 per cent. from 1 September 1993 onwards.

Regulation 7(2) of the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1990 determines the number of monthly instalments. Regulation 7(1) determines the date when repayments start, which depends on the length of the borrower's course. Regulation 7(3) determines the amount of the monthly instalments.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the cost to the Exchequer of the error made by the Student Loans Company in its calculations in its leaflet "Student Loans: Are You in the Picture?" ref. PO5 143/90.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am informed by the Student Loans Company that the cost of producing a second edition of its brochure was £120,907, which was met from within the company's approved budget.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the amounts by which the loan facilities will be uprated for the academic year 1991-92 for students in *(a)* London and *(b)* outside London.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to announce shortly the maximum loan facilities for the academic year 1991-92.

Access Funds

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the amounts each individual college will receive in access funds under the Education (Further and Higher Education Institutions Access Funds) Regulations 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Access fund grants have been paid to more than 400 institutions in England and Wales under the regulations. I am arranging for the figures requested to be placed in the Library. In addition, access fund grants have been paid to universities, polytechnics and colleges by the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council under sections 131(4) and 132(4) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Full-time Education and Training

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science in the latest available year how many 16 to 18-year-olds in England participated in full-time education and training.

Mr. Eggar: The number of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds, including overseas students, at annual census dates between November 1989 and January 1990, participating in full-time education or YTS in England was 1,040,000.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to ensure that where comprehensive schools decide to become grant maintained they will not be favoured by local authority funding in preference to primary schools.

Mr. Eggar: Recurrent grant for the direct costs of grant-maintained schools is calculated mainly by reference to the levels of provision that individual LEAs set for their own schools. The additional funds that grant-maintained schools receive in lieu of services previously provided centrally by their former LEA are not intended to be biased towards either primary or secondary schools.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools in the south-west are balloting parents on the question of grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: There are at present four schools in the south-west holding ballots on whether to apply for grant-maintained status. Seven GM schools are already operating in the region. A further four schools have either published proposals or are committed to doing so.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science in the latest available year what percentage of all schoolchildren taking GCSE in England sat the examination in mathematics; and of those who sat the examination in mathematics what percentage obtained grades C and above.

Mr. Eggar: In the academic year 1988-89, 91·6 per cent. of 16-year-old pupils attempting GCSE sat an examination in mathematics, and of these 39·9 per cent. gained grades C and above.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science in the latest available year, what percentage of all pupils taking the A-level examination in England took the examination in mathematics.

Mr. Eggar: In the academic year 1988-89, 37·2 per cent. of school leavers who had attempted at least one A-level had attempted mathematics.

King Edward VI College, Totnes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the ballot of parents of King Edward VI college, Totnes on grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: The parental ballot is due to close on Friday 25 January. We would expect the Electoral Reform Society to publish the result on the following Monday.

International Baccalaureate

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of people who received higher education and training and gained qualifications in universities outside this country during the period 1987-90 and the proportion of them who had gained the international baccalaureate in this country before commencing their course.

Mr. Eggar: Information is not available centrally.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will provide details of the availability of access to the international baccalaureate within the education system.

Mr. Eggar: It is for school and college authorities to decide whether to offer the international baccalaureate.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students have been entered for the international baccalaureate; and what proportion of those entered have been successful in passing the examination during each year from 1987-90.

Mr. Eggar: Information published by the International Baccalaureate Organisation shows that, in all countries taken together, there were 9,685, 11,286 and 12,217 candidates registered for the international baccalaureate as at May 1987, 1988 and 1989 respectively. Some 74 per cent. of candidates examined for the diploma achieved the qualification.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools provide the opportunity for sixth formers to take the international baccalaureate.

Mr. Eggar: Information provided by the International Baccalaureate Organisation indicates that 13 maintained and independent schools currently offer this examination.

Bedfordshire Schools

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil at secondary schools in Bedfordshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79 at constant prices.

Mr. Fallon: Bedfordshire spent £535 per secondary pupil in 1978-79 and £1,635 per secondary pupil in 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. At 1988-89 prices, those figures are £1,175 and £1,635 respectively.

Merit Awards

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the largest merit award given to an individual member of staff of the Science and Engineering Research Council during 1989-90.

Mr. Alan Howarth: During the financial year 1989-90, the largest merit award paid to an individual member of staff of the Science and Engineering Research Council was £700.

Nursery Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial support will be available for nursery provision in a primary school with grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whose responsibility it will be to fund nursery classes attached to primary schools which opt for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: Funding for nursery provision that forms an integral part of a grant-maintained primary school would be provided, as with other aspects of funding at that school, by the Secretary of State under the relevant Education (Grant-maintained schools) (Finance) Regulations. The financial support available would be related to LEA support for pupils of that age group.

City Technology College, Lincoln

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has had any discussions with *(a)* possible sponsors and *(b)* Lincolnshire local education authority about the development of a city technology college in Lincoln; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is aware that Lincolnshire LEA and a group of local industrialists are considering making proposals to him for the establishment of a school with many of the characteristics of a city technology college. The City Technology Colleges Trust has held discussions with those involved and an architect from the Department has visited the possible site of the school.

World Student Games

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has given any consideration to the relationship between a successful outcome of the world student games in Sheffield and the prospects for the United Kingdom of hosting similar international sporting events in the future.

Mr. Atkins: I hope that the world student games, like the other major international events to be held in the United Kingdom, will proceed successfully. However, the prospects for hosting major events in the United Kingdom depend primarily upon the strengths of each individual case.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the support from public funds of the world student games and similar international sporting events held in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: The policy for major international sports events in this country is to provide appropriate promotional and diplomatic support, if requested, but not direct funding. Funds specifically for sport are channelled through the Sports Council which has made available £3 million for the world student games.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out his Department's policy towards an individual local education authority using its own resources towards funding a city technology college; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is delighted that a number of local education authorities are considering involving themselves in initiatives to make the benefits of the city technology colleges more widely available. This is further evidence of the success of the city technology colleges programme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computer Software

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's policy towards competition in computer software from functionally similar but non-infringing programmes.

Mr. Leigh: The Government wish to encourage competition in the market in computer programs and the move to open systems. At the same time, we wish to encourage innovation and investment in research and development in this field and this requires a proper level of intellectual property protection. The market in the United Kingdom is both innovative and competitive and is evidence that our law provides a balance, giving strong protection without stifling competition. This balance is also to be seen in the directive on the legal protection of computer programs.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has received from British and European computer users over the purpose of his Department's late amendment to the EC draft directive on the subject of software copyright;

(2) what representations he has received from computer manufacturers regarding the EC draft directive on software copyright; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations he has received from British and European computer users over his Department's position regarding the draft EC directive on the legal protection of computer programs;

(4) what technical advice and consultation his Department has drawn on, particularly with regard to open systems and the views of computer users, prior to determining their position on the draft EC directive on software copyright;

(5) what representations he has received from the United States concerning software copyright protection.

Mr. Leigh: Throughout the period leading up to the agreement on a common position on the draft directive on the legal protection of computer programs, my Department received numerous representations from hardware manufacturers, software producers, users and others. These were principally from the United Kingdom, but also from other Community countries and the United States, and covered legal, technical and economic aspects of the issue. Representations were also made by the United States Government. In addition to a large number of individual meetings with interest groups and organisations, my Department held regular consultation and information meetings to which all the various interests involved were invited.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy on the extension of patent protection to software.

Mr. Leigh: Under the present law, the primary protection for computer software is copyright. The Patents Act 1977 excludes computer programs per se from

patenting, but an invention concerning an apparatus or method in which a novel and non-obvious computer program is applied in the achievement of a new technical result is patentable. I have no plans to change the law, which accords with the European patent convention.

Software Copyright

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how his Department categorises computer programmes with respect to copyright.

Mr. Leigh: Computer programs are specified as a category of literary work by section 3 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what procedures his Department intends to put in place to monitor and report on the effect of the EC draft directive on software copyright once it has been enacted;

(2) what levels of increased annual costs his Department assesses as acceptable, as a result of the draft EC directive on software copyright, in the sectors of *(a)* central Government, *(b)* local government, *(c)* retail, *(d)* banking and insurance, *(e)* manufacturing and *(f)* services;

(3) whether his Department has made any analysis of the potential costs to all public and private sector computer users of the draft EC directive on software copyright.

Mr. Leigh: A common position was agreed at the Internal Market Council in December on the draft directive on the legal protection of computer programs. We consider that the text as agreed will not result in substantial changes to existing United Kingdom copyright law and so will not impose any new costs on computer users or any need to introduce formal procedures to monitor the effects of any such changes.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the EC draft directive on software copyright would permit users to engage in the analysis of programs as necessary in order to maintain them.

Mr. Leigh: The directive would allow users to engage in the analysis of programs and permit maintenance, although not upgrading, of computer programs, subject to certain conditions. The lawful acquirer of a program may do what is necessary for the use of the program, including error correction. He may also decompile the program to the extent necessary to achieve interoperability of an independently created program with other programs.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent he has assessed the European Community draft directive on software copyright specifies that interfaces and access protocols, as distinct from their implementation in specific programs, are not themselves properly monopolised under contract.

Mr. Leigh: The text of the directive on which a common position was agreed in December specifies that

"ideas and principles which underlie any element of a computer program, including those which underlie its interfaces, are not protected by copyright under this directive".

The principle that copyright does not protect ideas, but only the expression of ideas, is inherent in our law and so this statement, which was included for avoidance of doubt, will not require implementation when the directive is finally adopted.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure the European Community Draft directive on software copyright gives adequate protection to United Kingdom companies which develop and market IBM-compatible PCs.

Mr. Leigh: The directive will require member states to give a proper level of copyright protection to computer programs produced by United Kingdom companies. Those engaged in producing IBM compatible PCs will receive protection for their software on exactly the same basis as any other United Kingdom software producer. Moreover, article 6 of the directive will ensure that interoperability between computer programs can always be achieved, so that compatibility and the move to open systems is not obstructed.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the protection offered under the draft EC directive on software copyright to the computer suppliers proprietary architectures and on his assessment of the consequences in respect of impeding the development of open standards.

Mr. Leigh: The directive will require member states to give copyright protection to computer programs as literary works. This is already the case in the United Kingdom. When the directive is implemented, the protection afforded will not change to any significant degree and so there is no reason to fear that the move to open systems will be impeded.

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Leigh: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the Department of Trade and Industry. Estimates are however made when there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold—currently £250. However following an interdepartmental exercise in 1972, in which the DTI participated, an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff cost as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Leigh: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question

is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Israeli Investment

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has of the level of Israeli investment in Britain and of British investment in Israel.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

The net book value of United Kingdom direct investment—in branches and subsidiary and associated companies—in Israel as at end 1987, the latest available information, was £24 million. Information on the net book value of direct investment by Israel in the United Kingdom is not available. Information on the level of United Kingdom portfolio investment in Israel or on Israeli portfolio investment in the United Kingdom is also not available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crawfordsburn Hospital

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the district valuer placed a valuation on the land and buildings at Crawfordsburn hospital; what was this value; to whom it was communicated; and when.

Dr. Mawhinney: The district valuer was asked by the DHSS on 5 November 1990 to provide a valuation of the premises and also advise on a disposal strategy, should the premises be declared surplus. The district valuer replied on 15 November 1990 to the DHSS advising that, if declared surplus, the premises should be marketed widely throughout the United Kingdom. I am advised that it could be prejudicial to any future sale if the DV's valuation, which may become an effective reserve price, were made known at this time.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether his Department received any requests for information on Mr. Colin Wallace from the Defence Select Committee.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Acute Beds

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many acute beds were available on a daily basis in hospitals in each of the health and social services board areas in 1979; and how many were available in 1990.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Health and social services board	*Average available acute beds*	
	1979	*1989-90*
Eastern	4,199	3,288
Northern	1,159	999
Southern	1,023	859
Western	928	703

Over the period the number of patients treated rose from 189,678 in 1979 to 218,313 in 1989-90.

Government Appointees

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of all government-appointed nominees to the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland since its formation, giving the year of appointment and the length of service in each case.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Name	
Mrs. M. Donaghy	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mr. R. E. Gaw	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mrs. N. Douglass	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mr. V. McGahie	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Miss C. Macmahon	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mrs. O. Marshall	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mrs. M. P. E. O'Hara	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mrs. B. M. H. Shiel	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1987
Mr. J. H. Allen	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mr. B. St. J. Collins	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mrs. A. L. Dickson	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mr. P. McCoy	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mr. E. O'Brien	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mr. J. L. Courtney-Thompson	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mrs. P. Walker	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mrs. J. Whiteside	1 January 1985 to 31 December 1990
Mrs. B. Hanna[1]	1 January 1985
Mr. R. J. Hanna[1]	1 January 1985
Mrs. G. H. J. Beveridge[1]	1 January 1988
Mr. W. D. Clements[1]	1 January 1988
Mrs. I. A. Colvin[1]	1 January 1988
Mr. M. F. L. Joyce[1]	1 January 1988
Mrs. L. M. Leonard[1]	1 January 1988
Lady McCollum[1]	1 January 1988
Mrs. J. C. Hopkirk	1 January 1988 to 31 December 1990
Mr. P. Dolan	1 January 1988 to February 1990[2]
Mr. J. A. Gallagher[1]	27 July 1990
Mr. G. A. Mills[1]	1 January 1991
Mrs. B. McErlane[1]	1 January 1991
Mr. N. J. McLaughlin[1]	1 January 1991
Miss M. J. McGrane[1]	1 January 1991
Mr. D. J. McGuinness[1]	1 January 1991
Mrs. J. McVitty[1]	1 January 1991
Mrs. N. P. O'Loan[1]	1 January 1991
Mrs. J. M. Trewsdale[1]	1 January 1991

[1] Still serving.
[2] Resigned.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of all Government appointed nominees to the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland since its formation, giving the year of appointment and the length of service in each case.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 16 January 1991:]* All members of the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland are appointed by Government. The following is a list of all those who are or have been members of the Drainage Council as constituted under the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

Name	Year of Appointment	Length of Service (Years)
Mr. F. Hamilton	1974	3
Mr. J. Hadden	1974	7
Mr. J. Bamford	1974	7
Mr. T. J. McCaughey	1974	3
Mr. J. Stewart	1974	3
Mr. H. McKeag	1974	11
Mr. W. McCombe	1974	3
Mr. J. Murphy	1974	3
Mr. D. Magee	1974	3
Lieutenant Colonel J. Sleator	1974	3
Mr. P. F. McGovern	1974	15
Mr. R. A. Brown	1974	3
Mr. S. O. Hicks	1974	7
Professor P. J. Newbould	1974	11
Mr. J. Scott	1974	3
Mr. W. P. Richardson	1974	7
Mr. A. E. McKelvie	1974	3
Mr. J. McMahon	1974	3
Mr. S. Rogers	1977	4
Mr. R. J. White	1977	4
Mr. A. McDonnell	1977	4
Mr. W. Brown	1977	4
Mr. P. J. McMahon	1977	4
Mr. J. Higgins	1977	4
Mr. T. A. Daly	1977	4
Mr. D. Robinson	1977	Expires 1993
Mr. G. L. Auret	1977	4
Mr. E. Whiteside	1977	4
Mr. E. Mayne	1977	4
Mr. R. Allen	1981	8
Mr. M. S. Bailey	1981	4
Mr. J. Gaston	1981	8
Mr. S. Gault	1981	8
Mr. W. H. King	1981	4
	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. A. P. McConaghy	1981	8
Mr. A. C. McFarland	1981	4
Mr. C. Noble	1981	4
Mr. J. Savage	1981	8
Dr. S. Cochrane	1981	Expires 1993
Mr. J. Brennan	1981	4
Mr. S. D. Rahilly	1981	4
Mr. C. C. Fox	1981	4
Mr. J. S. D. Gilmore	1986	3
Mr. J. S. Hamilton	1986	3
Mr. D. C. G. Irwin	1986	Expires 1993
Mr. L. McQuaid	1986	Expires 1993
Mr. W. F. O'Connell	1986	3
Mr. R. E. Parker	1986	Expires 1993
Mr. S. Rusk	1986	Expires 1993
Dr. J. Parsons	1986	Expires 1993
Mr. C. E. Ronaldson	1986	Expires 1993
Mr. I. C. Henderson	1986	1
Mr. N. E. Morrison	1987	Expires 1993
Mrs. M. Clarke	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. M. Curran	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. E. Hetherington	1990	Expires 1993
Mrs. A. Kelly	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. S. McCartney	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. J. McNickle	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. H. Nicholl	1990	Expires 1993
Mr. M. McCaldin	1990	Expires 1993

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy towards reopening an inquiry into the Kincora boys' home.

Dr. Mawhinney: This matter has been investigated first by the RUC, then by Sir George Terry and finally by his honour Judge Hughes. I can see no benefit in holding a further inquiry.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the inquiries concerning events at the Kincora boys' home.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* This matter has been investigated first by the RUC, then by Sir George Terry and finally by his honour Judge Hughes.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the individual identified as James in a television programme referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) of 11 June 1990, *Official Report*, column. *29* was interviewed about any role of the security and intelligence services concerning inquiries into the Kincora boys' home; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* I have nothing to add to the reply that my right hon. Friend, the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope) gave to the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 11 June 1990, *Official Report*, column *29*.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning the Kincora boys' home from January 1990 to current date.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* I have received 16 letters related to this subject during the period.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether he will re-examine all papers on the Kincora boys' home to ascertain the role of the security and intelligence services in decisions relating to an inquiry into Kincora in 1976;

(2) if he will place copies of all correspondence received from January 1990 to the present date concerning the Kincora boys' home, and his replies, in the Library.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* No.

TRANSPORT

Maritime Security

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make directions under the provisions of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 requiring the maritime industries to take security measures.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend today made directions which will require the industry to take specified measures to improve its counter-terrorist protective security precautions. These directions will be served on the industry as soon as can be arranged. Copies of the directions have been placed in the Library of the House.

Roads, Cheshire

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the level of the transport supplementary grant allocated to the Cheshire county council for 1991-92; and what was the comparable figure in cash and percentage terms for each of the preceding three years;

(2) what provision was made in the announcement of the transport supplementary grant for 1991-92 for the Cheshire county council to commence work on the Wheelock bypass.

Mr. Chope: The net level of transport supplementary grant allocated to Cheshire county council and the percentage change on the preceding years are:

	Transport supplementary grant £ million	*Per cent. change from previous year*
1988-89	1·364	−28·4
1989-90	2·766	103·5
1990-91	4·154	49·6
1991-92	5·501	32·4

No provision has been made for the Wheelock bypass in Cheshire county council's transport supplementary grant for 1991-92. The main works for this scheme are scheduled to start in 1993-94 and it will therefore be considered for support in that and subsequent years.

North Sea Standby Vessels

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the use of former fishing vessels as standby vessels in the North sea.

Mr. McLoughlin: Most fishing vessels have good sea-keeping qualities and when properly converted have had no difficulty meeting the requirements of the Department's code for the assessment of the suitability of standby vessels attending offshore installations. Some fishing vessels properly maintained and converted may meet the new requirements for standby vessels which are to be drawn up in the light of Lord Cullen's report into the Piper Alpha tragedy.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about North sea standby vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since 1988, a number of representations have been received. Nearly all of them centre principally on improvements to the Department's code for the assessment of standby vessels and when the new standards will be implemented.

Railway Maintenance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responsibilities are laid by him on Her Majesty's inspectors of railways to lay down or monitor their, or other bodies, standards of general maintenance of track, rolling stock or other operational equipment other than those recommended consequential on specific activities related to accidents.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's railway inspectorate sets non-statutory standards for fixed works and rolling stock, but does not lay down standards for maintenance work, which are matters for railway operators in accordance with their responsibilities for safe operation. The inspectorate has powers under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to require operators to conduct their undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, that the safety of passengers and staff is not compromised.

Rail Subsidy

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the total amount of subsidy paid in the last financial year to Network SouthEast;

(2) what was the total amount of subsidy paid in the last financial year to British Rail in respect of its operations in Wales.

Mr. Freeman: Subsidy is paid by the Government to the British Railways Board in the form of the public service obligation grant under EC regulation 1191/69 and section 3 of the Railways Act 1974, which compensates BR for maintaining loss-making passenger services, and level crossing grant under EC regulation 1192/69. The BR board received £498·6 million of PSO grant and £19·7 million of level crossings grant in the last financial year, 1989-90. Both grants are paid as totals to the board and the Government do not specifically allocate them between sectors or geographical areas, but some £95 million of the PSO grant related to Network SouthEast and the rest to the provincial sector.

London Transport

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total amount of subsidy given in the last financial year to London Transport distinguishing between bus operations and underground services.

Mr. Freeman: The Government do not pay grant separately in respect of bus and underground services. London Transport receives a block grant covering the totality of its external financial requirement. In 1989-90, grant to London Transport totalled £287 million.

InterCity Services

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail representations he has received about the improvement of Liverpool-London InterCity services by the use of a South Liverpool station as a stopping place for InterCity trains and the financial implications arising therefrom.

Mr. Freeman: We have received no representations on this matter.

BR Stations (Improvements)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail about financial assistance to improve the condition of the cuttings and make environmental improvements between Liverpool Lime Street and Edge Hill stations.

Mr. Freeman: No. These are operational matters for British Rail. However, I understand that preliminary discussions have taken place between BR and Merseyside development corporation and the Merseyside task force to create a partnership to carry out an environmental improvement scheme at Edge Hill station.

Coopers and Lybrand Report

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the Coopers and Lybrand report on non-channel tunnel traffic on railways.

Mr. Freeman: Coopers, Lybrand Deloitte are not undertaking any such work for my Department. It is for British Rail to decide whether to publish any reports that the firm produces for it.

Channel Tunnel Link

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report on the alternative routes for the rail link to the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that British Rail expects to have in the spring the results of the further studies into possible routes for the rail link to the channel tunnel.

No decisions have yet been taken by BR or the Department on the timing or form of publication of the results.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will establish a nationwide scheme of assistance for retirement pensioners to free travel on road and rail transport at off-peak hours;

(2) whether he will establish a nationwide scheme of assistance for retirement pensioners to travel at concessionary rates of 75 per cent. or 66 per cent. on road and rail transport in off-peak hours.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have no plans to change the present arrangements. Local authorities already have powers to provide free or cheap travel for pensioners on local public transport, and do so in some 90 per cent. of areas. Both British Rail and the long-distance coach operators also have their own travel concessions arrangements for the elderly.

Road Accidents

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many cases signals from taxi radios or mobile telephones have been implicated in road accidents through interference with car computers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department has no evidence of any road accidents that have resulted from electromagnetic interference—from whatever source—to electrical or electronic equipment fitted to vehicles.

There are already strict rules controlling the use of radio transmission and reception equipment on vehicles. There is a general European Community directive due to enter into force on 1 January 1992 that covers electromagnetic compatibility of all electrical and electronic equipment, both mobile and static.

We nevertheless need to ensure that, with the development of sophisticated electronic systems for vehicles, the satisfactory and safe operation of those systems will be maintained.

Draft proposals are now being formulated by the European vehicle industry for a Community directive intended specifically to cover electromagnetic compatibility of vehicles. This will set standards to control the emission of interference from vehicles and ensure their immunity to emissions from external sources. We support these proposals.

M40

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the total outturn cost of the M40 Waterstock to Umberslade, including the A43 Wendlebury-North Oxford and the widening of the M40 in the Chilterns *(a)* for preparation, design and supervision, *(b)* construction and contract costs and *(c)* land and compensation costs.

Mr. Chope: Outturn figures are not yet available. Total expenditure to date on the M40 Waterstock to Umberslade section, the Peartree Hill to Wendlebury section of A43 (now A34) and the widening of the M40 under each of the headings requested are:

(a) £41·11 million.
(b) £434·70 million.
(c) £11.38 million.

Interchange, Shrewsbury

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what would be the additional cost of improving the proposed interchange between the A49 and A5/M54 extension bypass currently under construction in Shrewsbury.

Mr. Chope: No estimate is available.

Second Severn Bridge

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the desirability of constructing the approach road to the second Severn bridge on the English side to three-lane capacity.

Mr. Chope: Northavon district council, the Automobile Association and Thornbury town council are among those who consider that the link from the second Severn crossing to the M4 in England should be built as a dual three-lane motorway, rather than as the proposed dual two-lane motorway.

The two proposed approach roads in England will together provide four lanes in each direction while the new bridge itself will have three lanes in each direction. All the proposed capacity is additional to that provided by the existing bridge and M4 motorway.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Safety Act

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what additional funds will be made available to local authorities for the financing of the enforcement of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are making available an additional £30 million per year from 1991-92 onwards to cover the additional cost for local authorities enforcing the Food Safety Act and the EC directive on the official control of foodstuffs.

Cattle Subsidies

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans *(a)* to change and *(b)* to abolish the £30 headage subsidy on the first 90 male cattle on any holding numbers.

Mr. Curry: No.

Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the duties and powers of the Eastern sea fisheries committee and its financial structure; and what changes he is planning.

Mr. Curry: The powers and duties of local fisheries committees are laid down in the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966, as amended. These principally concern the management and regulation of sea fisheries and shellfish fisheries and undertaking the necessary related enforcement.

The Eastern sea fisheries committee is one of 12 such committees in England and Wales and its district extends from Donna Nook in Lincolnshire to Dovercourt in Essex and seawards between these two points for three miles. Forty per cent. of its funding comes from Norfolk county council and 30 per cent. each from Lincolnshire and Suffolk county councils.

We have no plans to change these arrangements. However, we are considering the results of consultation on a proposal from the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees for a general extension of the seaward limit of sea fisheries committee jurisdiction from three to six miles.

Sole

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to press his counterparts in Europe to agree that the Dutch overfishing of 13,000 tonnes of sole in 1990 should be deducted from the 1991 quota allocated to the Netherlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Most member states, including the United Kingdom, fully or overfished their quotas before the Commission closed the North sea sole fishery on 21 December 1990. Latest provisional landings data indicate that the Netherlands has exceeded its quota by fewer than 200 tonnes, not 13,000 tonnes. The Commission has already set in train compensation proceedings because under the common fisheries policy a mechanism already exists whereby member states which overfish at the expense of others are required to provide appropriate compensation to those prejudiced.

Fishing Industry

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that the United Kingdom fishing industry will be competing on equal terms with all other EC member states after 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Ever since we negotiated the common fisheries policy in 1983, when we secured 37·3 per cent. of the quotas for the seven main edible species and very restricted access for other member states vessels to our coastal waters, a package which was acknowledged as a good one by our industry, we have consistently defended the position of our industry. As recently as the last December Fisheries Council we again secured a good package of fishing opportunities including additional quantities through the Hague preference and also a greater flexibility to catch western mackerel east of the 4°W line. We will continue to work to secure good arrangements.

Smoked Meat and Fish

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many businesses are involved in smoking and curing meat and fish products.

Mr. Maclean: The smoking and curing of meat and fish is mainly undertaken by businesses in two industries: activity heading 4122—bacon curing and meat products; and activity heading 4150—fish products. There are 822 local units recorded in the former of these industries and 354 in the latter, but only a small proportion of these units are known to undertake smoking or curing.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are employed in the smoked meat and fish industry; and what estimates have been made of the effect on employment of the implementation of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations.

Mr. Maclean: The smoking and curing of meat and fish is mainly undertaken by businesses in two industries: activity heading 4122—bacon curing and meat products; and activity heading 4150—fish products. It is estimated that there are about 53,000 persons employed in the former of these industries and 17,000 in the latter. Only a very small proportion of these are known to be involved in smoking or curing. Temperature controls are necessary to ensure the safety of certain foods as they reach the consumer. Where the processing of the food or the method of packaging can be shown to prevent the growth of pathogenic micro-organisms at ambient temperatures chill controls are not required. Industry will itself want to consider how its products can meet these food safety demands.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimate of how much smoked meat and fish is delivered by post each year.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments for 1991; when these amounts were initially paid out to farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *616*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

ODA Staffing Levels

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has regarding ODA staffing levels over the next five years.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans to make any significant changes to ODA staffing levels. The annual figures in the current public expenditure survey period will be given in the Departmental report to be published next month.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ODA staff are women at or above grade 7; and what is the percentage of women as a total of such staff.

Mrs. Chalker: Thirty-five ODA staff at G7 or above are women. The number includes eight women who are on secondment to other aid organisations. This represents 10·94 per cent. of all ODA staff at those levels, including seconded staff.

Africa (Famine)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the number of people in Africa currently threatened by famine.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Nations World Food Programme estimates that at least 20 million people are currently under threat.

Bangladesh

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the United Kingdom currently doing to help Bangladesh to prevent or to mitigate the effects of flooding.

Mrs. Chalker: Following the serious flooding in Bangladesh in 1988 we hosted an international conference in London on 11 and 12 December 1989 which reviewed and endorsed a rolling five-year flood action plan prepared for the Bangladesh Government by the World bank.

Britain agreed to undertake four of the 26 activities proposed in the plan, which are aimed at establishing ways to control and alleviate the effects of flooding. These are a major regional study on how to address the flooding problem in north-west Bangladesh; supporting studies to evaluate the effectiveness of previous flood control schemes and to assess ways of improving their operation and maintenance; and a study on fisheries, designed to ensure that the relationship between flood alleviation measures and fishery resources is properly understood. Consultants undertook feasibility work in Bangladesh in 1990 on the regional and fisheries studies and the main study teams for all four activities have now begun to arrive in Bangladesh.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will commission an independent survey on the effectiveness of the United Kingdom aid programme.

Mrs. Chalker: We regularly commission independent outside evaluators to work alongside our own evaluation department on studying the effectiveness of particular aspects of the aid programme. The results of around 50 studies completed over the last three years are available.

The development assistance committee—DAC—of the OECD also reviews the aid programmes of its members on a regular basis. A review of the United Kingdom aid programme is currently under way and the conclusions of the DAC will be announced in April.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was United Kingdom per capita aid in each of the last five years to *(a)* Sudan, *(b)* Ethiopia, *(c)* Angola, *(d)* Mozambique and *(e)* Liberia.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

United Kingdom gross bilateral aid (including emergency relief aid) per capita (£ actual) 1985-89 to Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique and Sudan

	1985[1]	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*[2]
Angola	0·02	0·03	0·03	0·05	0·14
Ethiopia	0·67	0·22	0·21	0·40	0·25
Liberia	0·50	0·40	0·39	0·36	0·26
Mozambique	0·62	0·52	1·63	2·01	1·50
Sudan	1·98	1·15	0·88	1·09	1·32

[1] Based on 1984 population figures.
[2] Based on 1988 population figures.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total of aid from the United Kingdom since 1987 to *(a)* each Latin American nation and *(b)* each (i) north, (ii) west, (iii) southern, (iv) central and (v) eastern African nation.

Mrs. Chalker: Following are the available figures:

Total Gross Bilateral United Kingdom Aid 1987-1989

Country	*£,000s*
AFRICA: *North*	
Algeria	1,160
Egypt	37,471
Morocco	1,313
Tunisia	2,062
AFRICA: *Sub-Saharan*	
Angola	2,077
Benin	808
Botswana	27,924
Burkina Faso	752
Burundi	358
Cameroon	17,205
Cape Verde Islands	152
C.A.R.	85
Chad	658
Comoros	8
Congo	701
Djibouti	383
Equatorial Guinea	306
Ethiopia	39,523
Gabon	64
Gambia	18,491
Ghana	103,335
Guinea	1,564
Guinea-Bissau	122
Ivory Coast	20,496
Kenya	132,291
Lesotho	14,854
Liberia	2,383
Madagascar	1,310
Malawi	114,603
Mali	3,437
Mauritania	515
Mauritius	26,723
Mozambique	76,410
Namibia	4,545
Niger	675
Nigeria	77,768
Rwanda	799
Sao Tome and Principe	16
Senegal	5,637
Seychelles	4,580
Sierra Leone	9,115
Somalia	19,201
South Africa	10,637
Sudan	77,889
Swaziland	14,692
Tanzania	101,156

Country	£,000s
Togo	679
Uganda	69,556
Zaire	4,437
Zambia	52,100
Zimbabwe	57,880
AMERICA: *Central*	
Costa Rica	10,151
Cuba	5
Dominican Republic	173
El Salvador	709
Guatemala	61
Haiti	10
Honduras	2,678
Mexico	3,055
Nicaragua	241
Panama	1,777
AMERICA: *South*	
Bolivia	8,848
Brazil	4,559
Chile	799
Colombia	4,554
Ecuador	5,209
Paraguay	1,105
Peru	3,461
Surinam	17
Uruguay	57
Venezuela	56

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the level of United Kingdom bilateral aid since 1987 to the 20 poorest nations as measured by GDP: and what information he has as to the percentage this aid represents of the total aid received by that nation in each case.

Mrs. Chalker: The information for 1987 and 1988 is as follows:

	United Kingdom bilateral ODA £'000	*Percentage of total ODA receipts (including multilateral aid)*
Cambodia	100	0·6
Afghanistan	1,932	2·8
Vietnam	0	0·0
Mozambique	51,478	5·7
Ethiopia	27,413	3·0
Bhutan	682	1·4
Guinea-Bissau	81	0·1
Tanzania	59,194	5·3
Chad	431	0·2
Malawi	49,541	13·1
Bangladesh	75,656	4·0
Zaire	3,709	0·5
Nepal	20,817	4·7
Somalia	13,906	2·4
Madagascar	994	0·3
Laos	162	0·2
Burma	6,909	1·4
Gambia	12,559	5·8
Mali	2,281	0·5
Burundi	206	0·1
Total	328,051	3·4

Notes:

(1) These figures are for net official development assistance (oda).

(2) The figures in the left-hand column are for United Kingdom bilateral aid only, and thus do not include the United Kingdom share of multilateral aid to these countries, which is included in the total oda receipts figure which forms the basis of the right-hand column.

(3) The figures include official development assistance recorded in 1987 and 1988: figures for other donors for 1989 are not yet available in this form.

Sources: British Aid Statistics: United Kingdom aid.
OECD: Total oda receipts.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total level of aid, broken down by continent, formally requested of the United Kingdom over the past 12 months; and how much of this total was agreed to.

Mrs. Chalker: Formal requests for specified amounts of British aid are rarely received. We are in regular consultation with the main recipients of bilateral aid about the amounts of British aid that might be made available and the purposes for which it might be used.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in Asia and the middle east were beneficiaries of funds from the aid and trade provision in the last year.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1990, spending under the aid and trade provision took place in respect of projects in the following countries:

Asia
Burma
China
India
Indonesia
Malaysia
Pakistan
Philippines
Sri Lanka
Thailand

Middle East
Jordan
Yemen Arab Republic

Sri Lanka

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of bilateral aid to Sri Lanka.

Mrs. Chalker: Total United Kingdom bilateral aid to Sri Lanka was £23·552 million in 1989, the latest year for which figures are available, and comprised:

	£ million
Capital aid	6·391
Technical co-operation	8·222
Aid and trade provision	4·158
Commonwealth development corporation	3·114
Debt relief	1·589
Disaster relief	0·078

Expenditure is expected to have been substantially less in 1990, due in part to the security situation

Poland

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intended to make further significant aid available to Poland during 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall continue to help Poland from the know-how fund for eastern Europe. I expect that the level of expenditure in 1991-92 will be similar to that in 1990-91—about £10 million.

Physically and Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds are made available by the ODA specifically to assist the physically and mentally handicapped.

Mrs. Chalker: Funds specifically to assist physically and mentally handicapped people are made available from our geographical programmes, through our joint funding scheme—JFS—with British charities and through international aid agencies. Examples of our geographical activities are:

—In India we have supported Indian Spastic Societies in Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta since 1979. We currently have under consideration a programme of further support to these societies, plus another in Madras at a cost of around £1·6 million.

—In Fiji we are spending £40,000 on a project with the Disabled Peoples' Association.

—In Malawi we are sponsoring 15 ophthalmic technicians from the region to be trained and equipped to return to their countries to work as peripatetic operators. The cost of this project is £73,000.

In the financial year 1989-90 over £651,000 was provided under the JFS for projects specifically intended to benefit disabled people. International agencies supported by the ODA which undertake projects to promote the welfare of disabled people include the WHO, UNCHR and UNIDO.

Illiteracy

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional resources have been made available by his Department to help combat illiteracy in developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: I am ready to give additional help, but the ODA must take account of the plans and priorities of developing country Governments.

I hope that the world conference on education for all which was held in Thailand last year will encourage governments to give greater priority to combating illiteracy. We currently spend £3·7 million of capital and technical co-operation funds specifically on primary education and adult literacy. We are making £20 million available this year to the joint funding scheme for non-governmental organisation work which includes a number of literacy projects.

Least-developed Countries

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid his Department is giving to help the least-developed countries develop more effective governmental, legal and commercial structures; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Effective governmental, legal and commercial structures are essential to economic and social development in least developed countries, as elsewhere. We provide assistance under our aid programme in many least developed countries through technical cooperation and training. Our aid also provides financial support for economic reform programmes linked to strengthening of these structures.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all projects and programmes funded by the Commonwealth Development Corporation in the last five years.

Mrs. Chalker: The following is the list of the projects in which the Commonwealth Development Corporation made an investment during the years 1986 to 1990.

Projects receiving CDC investment in 1986

Country	*Project*
Belize	Belize Hotel Ltd.
Botswana	Water Utilities Corporation
Botswana	Botswana Housing Corporation
Botswana	Botswana Telecom
Botswana	Botswana Development Corporation
Cameroon	Cameroon Development Corporation
Cameroon	Societe Hevea Cameroun (La)
Cayman Islands	Caribbean Utlities Co. Ltd.
Costa Rica	Inst Costa de AYA
Costa Rica	Inst Costa de Elect
Costa Rica	Inst Costa de AYA
Fiji	Fiji forest Industries Ltd.
Ghana	Twifo Oil Palm
Honduras	Division Municipal de Aguas
Indonesia	Nucleus Estate and Smallholders Project VI
Indonesia	Nucleus Estate and Smallholders Project VII
Ivory Coast	Societe pour le Development des Plantations Forestieres (Hardwood)
Ivory Coast	Rubber Outgrowers Project II—Cavally
Ivory Coast	Rubber Outgrowers Project II—Smallholder
Ivory Coast	Societe pour le Development des Plantations Forestieres I (Hardwood)
Ivory Coast	Palmindustrie
Jamaica	Coffee Industry Board
Kenya	Smallholder Coffee
Kenya	Kenya Power Co. Ltd.
Kenya	Oil Crop Development
Malawi	Mandala Ltd.
Malawi	Kawalazi Estates
Malawi	Blantyre Water Board
Malawi	Mandala Ltd.
Malaysia	Darabif Sdn Bhd
Malaysia	Aluminium Industries Sdn Bhd
Mauritius	Mauritius Housing Corporation
Papua New Guinea	Electricity Supply Commission
Sri Lanka	Pelwatte Sugar
Sri Lanka	Samanala Wena
St. Lucia	St. Lucia Model Farms
Sudan	Sudanese Fermentation Industry Ltd.
Tanzania	Tanganyika Wattle Co.
Tanzania	Kibo Match
Thailand	World Aquaculture
Thailand	Thailand Rubber Replanting Aid Fund
Uganda	Sugar Corporation of Uganda Ltd.
Vanuatu	Metensel Estates Ltd.
Zambia	Zambia Sugar Co. Ltd.
Zambia	Mpomgwe Development Co. Ltd.
Zambia	Zambia Oxygen Ltd.
Zimbabwe	Rusitu Valley Development Co. (Pvt) Ltd.
Zimbabwe	Low Cost Housing

Projects receiving CDC investment for first time in 1987

Country	*Project*
Barbados	Caribbean Financial Services Corporation
Botswana	Botswana Power Corporation
Cameroon	Societe Hevea Cameroun (La)
Cameroon	Cameroon Development Corporation II
Ecuador	Palmoriente SA
Indonesia	Smallholder Rubber Development Project II
Ivory Coast	Societe Africaine de Plantations d'Heveas
Jamaica	Forest Industries Development Co. Ltd.
Jamaica	St. Mary Bananas Est. Ltd.
Kenya	Kulalu Ranching Co. Ltd.

Country	Project
Malawi	Blantyre Netting Co. Ltd.
Malawi	Malawi Government
Malawi	Kavuzi Tea Co.
Malawi	Investment and Development Bank of Malawi Ltd.
Malaysia	Palong Cocoa Sdn Bhd
Malaysia	Palong Cocoa Sdn Bhd
Mauritius	Mauritious Export Development & Investment Authority
Mauritius	Bonair Fashion Ltd.
St. Lucia	St. Lucia Electricity
Swaziland	Langa National Brickworks (Pty) Ltd.
Swaziland	Shiselweni Forestry Co. Ltd.
Swaziland	Natex Swaziland Ltd.
Tanzania	Tanzania Government
Thailand	Thailand Rubber Replanting Aid Fund
Uganda	Toro and Mityana Tea Co. Ltd.
Vanuatu	South Santo Cattle Co.
Zambia	Kafue Textiles of Zambia Ltd.
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Development Bank

Projects receiving CDC investment for first time in 1988

Country	Project
Belize	Belize Electricity Board
BVI	BVI Electricity Corporation
Ecuador	Empresa Nacional de Energia Eletrica
France	Tropiclone SA
Ghana	Volta River Authority
India	Shipping Credit and Investment Company of India
India	Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India
Indonesia	PT Coklat Ransiki
Ivory Coast	Serebou Seed Project
Jamaica	Jamaica Telephone Co.
Kenya	Development Finance Co. of Kenya Ltd.
Kenya	Kulalu Ranching Co. Ltd.
Malawi	Capital Developments Ltd.
Malawi	Investment and Development Bank of Malawi Ltd.
Malawi	Impala Farming Co. Ltd.
Malawi	Sable Farming Co. Ltd.
Malawi	Malawi Government
Malaysia	Desa Tea Sdn Bhd
Mauritius	Mauritius Export Development and Investment Authority
Mauritius	Woventex Ltd.
Mauritius	Development Bank of Mauritius
Pakistan	Mubarik Dairies Ltd.
Papua New Guinea	PNG Venture Fund (Pty) Ltd.
Papua New Guinea	Poliamba pty Ltd.
Papua New Guinea	New Guinea Plantation Ltd.
Papua New Guinea	Milne Bay Estates Pty Ltd.
Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd.
Thailand	Thai Factory Development Co. Ltd.
Thailand	Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand
Uganda	Development Finance Co. of Uganda Ltd.
Vanuatu	Tanna Coffee Development Co. Ltd.
Vanuatu	South Santo Cattle Co.
Zimbabwe	Cold Storage Commission
Zimbabwe	Southdown Holdings Ltd.

Projects receiving CDC investment for first time in 1989

Country	Project
Bangladesh	United Leasing Company Ltd.
Bangladesh	New Dhaka Refractories (Bangladesh) Ltd.
Bangladesh	Padma Textile Mills Ltd.
Cameroon	Socatral
Costa Rica	Cooperativa Agroindustrial de Productores de Palma Aceitera R. L.
Cote D'Ivoire	Rubber Outgrowers Project V
Fiji	Fiji Development Bank
India	Sakthi Soyas Ltd.
India	Credit Capital Venture Fund (India) Ltd.
India	Asian Coffee Ltd.
India	Shipping Credit and Investment Company of India
India	Rane Power Steering Ltd.
Indonesia	PT Kewalram
Jamaica	Jablum (Jamaica) Ltd.
Jamaica	Caribbean Housing Finance Corporation Ltd.
Kenya	African Management Services Ltd.
Kenya	Koma Rock Housing Project
Malawi	National Seed Co. of Malawi Ltd.
Malawi	Malawi Hotels Ltd.
Malawi	The Match Co. Ltd.
Malawi	Sable Farming Co. Ltd.
Mauritius	Development Bank of Mauritius
Mauritius	Shape Fabrics Ltd.
Mauritius	Maunex (Mauritius) Ltd.
Pakistan	Hala Spinning Ltd.
Papua New Guinea	MacGregor Property Pty. Ltd.
Philippines	H & Q Philippine Ventures Inc.
Sudan	Sudan Rural Development Finance Co. Ltd.
Swaziland	Swaziland Meat Industries Ltd.
Swaziland	Inyoni Yami Swaziland Irrigation Scheme
Swaziland	Swaziland Industrial Development Co. Ltd.
Tanzania	East Usambara Tea Company Ltd.
Tanzania	Chrismill Farms Ltd.
Thailand	Mongkolwat Company Ltd.
Uganda	Uganda Electricity Board
Vanuatu	Metenesel Estates Ltd.
Zambia	National Hotels Development Corporation
Zambia	Masstock (Zambia) Ltd.
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Development Bank

Projects receiving CDC investment for first time in 1990

Country	Project
Bangladesh	Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company
Belize	Big Falls Plantations Ltd.
Belize	Toledo Enterprise Ltd.
Botswana	Water Utilities Corporation
Costa Rica	Cooperation Agroindustial de Productores de Palma aceitera R.L.
Cote d' Ivoire	Project Serebou
Ecuador	Instituto Ecuatoriano de Telecommunicaciones
Ecuador	Pamoriente SA
India	Andhra Petrochemicals Ltd.
India	Apollo Tyres Ltd.
India	Modi Threads Ltd.
Indonesia	PT Tasik Raja Palm Oil Mill
Jamaica	Caribbean Housing Finance Corporation
Jamaica	Ciboney Villas Ltd.
Jamaica	Dr. Ian Sangster and Co. Ltd.
Jamaica	Trafalgar Development Bank Ltd.
Kenya	Galsheet (Kenya) Ltd.
Kenya	South Nyanza Sugar Co.
Malawi	Impala Farming Co. Ltd.
Malaysia	Wembley Rubber Products (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd
Pakistan	Fauji Fertiliser Co. Ltd.
Pakistan	Pakistan Industrial Leasing Co.
Papua New Guinea	Papua New Guinea Electricity Commission
Philippines	Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.
PNG	New Guinea Plantations Ltd.
Solomon Islands	Kolombangara Forest Products Ltd.
Tanzania	East Usambara Tea Co. Ltd.
Thailand	Mah Boonkrong Sirichai 25 Company
Thailand	Phansriviat Company Ltd.
Uganda	Development Finance Co. of Uganda Ltd.
Vanuatu	National Housing Corporation
Zambia	National Hotels Development Corporation
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Electricity Services

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Souvenir Kiosk

32. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the total turnover from the House of Commons souvenir kiosk during November and December; and what estimated profit after deducting wages and administration charges the authorities will receive.

Mr. MacGregor: The total turnover of the Refreshment Department kiosk during November and December 1990 including VAT, was £109,786 and £213,318, respectively. Equivalent gross profits were £34,368 and £66,778, respectively. After the deduction of £5,261·53 for direct payroll costs during the two-month period, the net operating surplus for both months combined was £95,884·47.

40. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what were the takings of the House of Commons kiosk *(a)* in the four weeks to Christmas and *(b)* over the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The takings, or turnover, of the Refreshment Department souvenir kiosk during the four weeks to Christmas 1990 and for the previous 12 months to Christmas—including VAT—were £246,472 and £701,404, respectively.

Members of the European Parliament

39. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to improve liaison between the House and Members of the European Parliament.

Mr. MacGregor: At its next meeting the Services Committee will be asked to consider measures designed to facilitate contacts between this House and Members of the European Parliament. Proposals will also be presented for the introduction of free postage and telephone calls with EC institutions.

Procedural Changes

41. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he is now in a position to announce any proposals for procedural changes for the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The House will be considering important changes to the European Standing Committees tomorrow.

Notices of Motions

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many days between 1 July 1987 and 31 December 1990 the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has tabled notices of motions relating to each of *(a)* the Select Committee on Legal Affairs, *(b)* reform of House of Commons procedure, *(c)* sittings of the House and *(d)* Members' facilities; and what estimate he has made of the total cost to public funds and the volume of newsprint that have been involved in the printing of the motions.

Mr. MacGregor: The total cost to public funds of printing and publishing notices of motions relating to *(a)* a Select Committee on Legal Affairs, *(b)* the reform of the House of Commons procedure, *(c)* sittings of the House and *(d)* Members facilities, tabled by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) in Sessions 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and in the current Session to 31 December 1990 is estimated as £68,000. The volume of paper consumed was about 345,000 sheets of A4 paper. The number of days on which the notices of motions were tabled in each Session are as follows:

Number of days

Motion	*Session 1987-88*	*Session 1988-89*	*Session 1989-90*	*Session 1990-91*[1]	*Total*
(a) Select Committee on Legal Affairs	—	71	[2]87	—	158
(b) Procedure	69	122	132	23	346
(c) Sittings	69	123	132	23	347
(d) Facilities	—	115	132	23	270

[1] Up to 31 December 1990.
[2] The figure given in the *Official Report* of 14 June 1990, column *298* was incorrect.

Committee Rooms

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans there are for House of Commons Committee Rooms to be fitted with the audio loop.

Mr. MacGregor: With the exception of three rooms, where the installation of an electronic loop to enhance audibility for the hard of hearing was not considered practical, all other rooms on the Committee Corridor are equipped with that facility. So too is the Great Committee Room, Westminster Hall.

Reception of proceedings by means of these loops requires the attendance of an operator and so is not available for those Select Committees, the proceedings of which are not recorded by sound or for television broadcast, nor for private meetings.

The system is compatible with most modern hearing aids and with portable receivers available on loan from the Serjeant's staff on duty in the Committee Corridor.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Economic Sanctions

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the nations against which the United Kingdom is currently operating economic sanctions, giving the reason in each case.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are implementing a variety of restrictive measures on our trade and other relations with a number of countries. These include:

(a) controls, operated for strategic reasons, through COCOM on the export of high technology equipment which could be used for military as well as civil purposes to a number of proscribed destinations, including the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China. COCOM comprises the NATO countries, less Iceland, as well as Japan and Australia;

(b) a variety of restrictive measures on our economic relations with South Africa, implemented within the EC and by agreement with the Commonwealth, as a signal of our disapproval of apartheid. For details of these measures I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 15 February 1990 and to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 19 February 1990. Since then, we have lifted the ban on new investments and the Commonwealth voluntary ban on the promotion of tourism to South Africa (on 23 February 1990) and the European Council has lifted the ban on new investments Community-wide (on 15 December 1990);

(c) restrictions not aimed at particular countries, such as those of the missile technology control regime, and those resulting from our commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, and controls on the export of material used in production of chemical and biological weapons;

(d) special restrictions applied to arms exports to certain countries, for example, in the middle east, reflecting our wish not to fuel or prolong conflicts in the region, and our determination to take a firm line on state-sponsored terrorism. The embargo on trade in arms with China, introduced by the European Community in June 1989 to mark their concern about the repression of the democracy movement, remains in place;

(e) economic sanctions imposed on Iraq and occupied Kuwait, in accordance with our obligations under UNSCR 661, following Iraq's illegal invasion of Kuwait and subsequent refusal to withdraw.

FCA

Military Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total level of British military aid to the 20 poorest nations, measured by GDP, since 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Excluding the cost of the garrison in Belize, the figures are as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	2·1
1988-89	1·8
1989-90	2·7
1990-91	2·6

Katyn Massacre

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there will now be a statement to correct official information regarding the Polish Government in exile's claims concerning the responsibility for Katyn.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have in the past issued no statement or official comment on the Polish Government in exile's claims about Katyn. As we have said before, the Soviet authorities' admission last April that the NKVD was responsible for the massacre was very welcome.

Dounreay

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been afforded to AEA Fuel Services by British embassies to assist in the promotion of Dounreay.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: AEA Fuel Services has not sought our help in providing the services that it offers.

Technology Exports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to brief exporters of militarily sensitive technologies of their responsibilities in such exports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry. There are regular consultations among Whitehall departments on the enforcement of export controls. When necessary officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office participate in briefings organised by the DTI for business men.

Khmer Rouge

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A comprehensive political settlement that enables the Cambodian people to choose their own government free from the fear of Khmer Rouge atrocities, civil war and invasion is the best way to bring durable peace to Cambodia and prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power. That is the purpose of the document drawn up in November 1990 by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the co-chairmen of the Paris conference on Cambodia and the United Nations Secretary General's representative. As one of the permanent five, the United Kingdom will continue to work for the acceptance and implementation of this document.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his reply of 12 November 1990, *Official Report*, columns *54-55*, what information he has on the number of tanks the Khmer Rouge possess, and who supplied them; and what efforts he is taking as a member of the United Nations Security Council to restrain Khmer Rouge military aggression in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We understand that the Khmer Rouge has acquired a number of tanks of Chinese origin.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Britain is playing an active role in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Cambodian conflict. Acceptance by all Cambodian parties of the draft comprehensive settlement document agreed in Paris on 23 to 26 November by the permanent five, the co-chairmen of the Paris conference and the United Nations Secretary-General's representative would be the best way to bring the fighting to an end. The Five have repeatedly called on all parties to stop fighting and co-operate to the full in helping to implement the settlement document.

Cambodia

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if, in his discussions with the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, while drafting the United Nations framework for Cambodia, he sought a commitment from them to end supplies of military aid to the Cambodian parties;

(2) if he will now seek a commitment from the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to end supplies of military aid to the Cambodian parties.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A commitment has already been given in the framework document a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House endorsed by the United Nations Security Council in resolution 668 of 20 September 1990.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he is making to ensure the cessation of arms supplies to the warring parties in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) of 14 January, at column *382*.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he envisages for the international control mechanism to monitor military action in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Under the United Nations peace plan, the international control mechanism proposed at the Paris conference on Cambodia in August 1989 is replaced by the military component of the United Nations transitional authority—UNTAC. Its functions are set out in the draft settlement document agreed by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the co-chairmen of the Paris conference on Cambodia and the United Nations Secretary-General's representative in Paris on 23 to 26 November 1990.

Baltic States

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Government policy concerning the development of democratic self-government for Lithuania and other Baltic states within the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the right of the Baltic peoples to determine their own future, and welcome the progress made in the last two years towards this goal. We have strongly urged the Soviet authorities not to reverse that process. To do so would contravene the Soviet Union's commitment to strengthen democracy, under the charter for a new Europe signed in Paris on 21 November 1990. Only free negotiation based on democratic principles can provide a solution to the problems of the Baltic peoples.

Lithuania

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the Lithuanian Foreign Minister; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I met the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Mr. Algirdas Saudargas at the Foreign Office on 15 January. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Mr. Saudargas on 16 January. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in reply to his question later that day, we shared Mr. Saudargas's anxiety about the continuing threat of repression in Lithuania and other republics.

Albania

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will bring forward a programme of bilateral and European Community advice and aid to the Government and people of Albania following their elections.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We shall not take a decision on this before the election.

Mr. Jonathan Moyle

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if his Department has been informed officially of the latest court decision in Chile of the circumstances of Mr. Jonathan Moyle's death;

(2) if he will make a statement regarding inquiries carried out by his Department into the circumstances in Jonathan Moyle, met his death in Chile;

(3) if his Department has any details of the information Mr. Jonathan Moyle, found dead in Chile, had come across in relation to arms being exported from Chile to Iraq.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 17 January 1991]:* The circumstances of Mr. Jonathan Moyle's tragic death are still under investigation by the Chilean autborities; no decision has yet been reached. Her Majesty's coroner for Exeter and East Devon has opened and adjourned an inquest. It is for these authorities to determine the cause of death.

The British embassy in Santiago, has been, and remains in close and regular touch with the Chilean authorities and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in contact with Mr. Moyle's family. Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor the British embassy at Santiago has ever taken an official position on the cause of Mr. Moyle's death. I have looked into media reports that Mr. Moyle may have come across information about Chilean arms sales to Iraq, but I have no evidence to substantiate this.

DEFENCE

Civilian Employees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many serving members of the Royal Air Force and civilians working ancillary to the Royal Air Force are employed in Wales; and if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Air Force in Wales;

(2) how many serving members of the Army and civilians working ancillary to the Army are employed in Wales; and if he will make a statement on the future of the Army in Wales.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 4,646 established RAF posts and 2,643 civilians employed at

RAF units in Wales, while the Army presence comprises some 650 trained service personnel and 550 civilian employees. A strengthening of this presence in future would be consistent with wider Government policy on relocation; and certainly we shall take account of the natural advantages offered by Wales, especially for training, in our planning for any redeployments. We are, however, contemplating a significant reduction in the long-term size of our forces under "options for change", and the impact of this is bound to be felt to some degree in Wales as in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government will undertake a public survey of the problems of toxic waste pollution in and around United States overseas bases as it affects United States bases in Britain, including bases closing or closed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no plans to undertake such a survey.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information Her Majesty's Government has or intends to seek on the problems of toxic waste pollution in and around United States bases in Britain;

(2) whether Her Majesty's Government will seek binding agreements with the United States Government to ensure the clean-up, at United States expense, of all United States bases in Britain and surrounding areas which have been affected by toxic waste pollution.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Such bases are bound by the same environmental legislation as military establishments occupied by our own armed forces. Any particular occurrence of pollution, either governed by such legislation or otherwise notifiable, are dealt with in the appropriate manner. There are in addition general agreements, on basing responsibilities already in existence.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government intends to examine the United States congressional report on the problems of toxic waste pollution in and around United States overseas bases, due to be published at the end of 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I understand that no such report exists.

Body Bags

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has placed orders for body bags with firms in Halifax and the Calder Valley during the last six months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Ammunition

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the provision of ammunition by the United Kingdom's European partners for the United Kingdom Gulf force, including who is financing such ammunition and the reasons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During the build-up of the British contribution to the multinational force in the Gulf we sought additional ammunition of certain types from our European allies. Most of the ammunition required was provided either on loan—that is on a replacement or repayment basis—or for a nominal price, although some was procured at the market price.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Visual Handicap

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people receive mobility allowance whose main disabling condition is listed as blindness or disease of the eye;

(2) how many people receive mobility allowance solely on the basis of visual impairment.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Benefits and Allowances

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department intends to take regarding the Court of Appeal judgment in July 1990, Secretary of State *v.* Thomas, Cooze, Beard, Murphy and Morley *v.* Secretary of State, regarding discriminatory upper age limits for severe disability allowance and invalid care allowance.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has appealed to the House of Lords against the decision of the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department will save through the restriction of paying back-dated benefits arising from test cases, introduced by the Social Security Act 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: Savings for the current financial year are estimated to be of the order of £2 million.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review. The Department of Social Security does not process classified information on its mainframe or lap-top computers.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for the Doncaster area, how many *(a)* pensioner households, *(b)* families with children and *(c)* other households who are tenants of (i) Doncaster local authority, (ii) housing associations and (iii) other landlords, are estimated to be receiving (1) maximum housing benefits with no deduction for non-dependants,

(2) maximum housing benefit but with deductions for non-dependants and (3) a lesser amount of housing benefit towards their rent payments currently and over the periods 1988-89 and 1989-90; and what proportions of the total numbers of tenants in each category they represent.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Loans and Grants

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state *(a)* the amounts available and *(b)* the amounts taken up by each Department of Social Security office in Scotland for (i) crisis loans, (ii) budgeting loans and (iii) community care grants in each year since the system was introduced, including the current year until the latest convenient date.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is available in the Library.

Supplementary Benefit and Income Support

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing how many people were provided for by supplementary benefit or income support in Scotland in each year since 1974 separately identifying the number of children.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table:

Thousands

Year	*Total claimants, partners and dependants*	*Of which children (0-15 years)*
1974	n/a	n/a
1975	449	115
1976	n/a	n/a
1977	473	120
1978	468	120
1979	451	109
1980	482	119
1981	608	154
1982	705	183
1983	713	177
1984	772	195
1986	832	212
1987	862	216
1988	827	226
1989	799	223

Source: Annual Statistical Inquiries.

Notes:
(a) Information for 1974 is not available in the form requested.
(b) The Annual Statistical Inquiries for 1976 is incomplete. It does not contain details of unemployed cases.
(c) There was no Annual Statistical Inquires in 1985; the one due in December that year was deferred until February 1986.

Income Support Deductions

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many, and what percentage of, income support claimants in Scotland *(a)* aged over 60 years and *(b)* aged under 60 years are repaying social fund budgeting loans or crisis loans by deductions from their benefit payments.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the number and the percentage of income support claimants in Scotland *(a)* aged over 60 and *(b)* aged under 60 repaying social fund budgeting loans or crisis loans from their benefit payments at the end of November 1990.

	Number of Recoveries November 1990	*Percentage of IS Recipients repaying via benefit*
(a) Aged over 60	3,860	2·6
(b) Aged under 60	82,803	24·3

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support deductions are currently being made, in Scotland for *(a)* poll tax arrears, *(b)* social fund loan payments, *(c)* fuel payment arrears and *(d)* any other purposes; and what proportion of income support claimants are having such deductions made from benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information is shown in the tables. The number of income support customers having one or more deductions made from their benefit is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1
Deductions from income support
(Social fund loan repayments, community charge, accommodation and fuel charges)

Purpose	*Number of deductions* [1]
Community charge arrears	17,556
Social fund loan repayments	86,663
Fuel	59,128[2]
Other purposes	9,739

[1] Number at 30 November 1990 derived from the Department's management information system which, with the exception of social fund loan repayments, is obtained from a quarterly count of deductions in action. Data on social fund loan repayments are collected monthly.
[2] Some deductions for fuel charges cover current consumption costs only because the arrears have been cleared. It is not possible to identify only those cases with continuing arrears.

Table 2
Recovery of overpaid benefit, voluntary unemployment deductions

Purpose	*Number of deductions*
Recovery of overpaid benefit	10,288
Voluntary unemployment deductions	3,590

Note
The information is not collected routinely and derives from table 10 of the annual statistical inquiry in May 1989, a copy of which is in the Library.

Social Fund

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases each year, including the current year to the latest convenient date, since the social fund was introduced, the Social Fund Commissioner has referred appeals back to the local offices in Scotland; and in how many such cases the local office has then *(a)* approved and *(b)* refused payment.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91[1]
Cases referred back by social fund inspectors to Scottish social fund offices for redetermination	213	582	713
Cases in which no payment was made as a result of redetermination	100	361	429

[1] April to December

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy for applications for attendance allowance to be dealt with directly by Department of Social Security staff at local and regional level instead of through his Department's offices in Blackpool.

Mr. Scott: Claimants currently send attendance allowance—AA—claim forms to nine regional centres where initial processing is done. Claims are passed to the attendance allowance unit in Blackpool for award and payment. After the introduction of disability living allowance, DLA and AA claim forms will be sent to regions boths for processing and award, but, for AA only, payments and notifications will be issued from the AA unit in Blackpool. DLA initial awards will be paid from the appropriate regional centre. These arrangements will be reviewed in the light of experience.

All renewal claims and reviews for DLA and AA will be dealt with centrally at the AA and DLA units in Blackpool.

Claimants will be able to obtain general information about DLA and AA from the benefits inquiry line or their local benefit offices. The new DLA computer system will enable the unit's staff to give prompt details about individual claims from telephone inquiries.

Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a response to his letter of 9 November 1990 referring to Mrs. R. Tunnicliffe.

Mr. Jack: I replied to my hon. Friend on 17 January.

Community Care

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department is taking to follow up recommendation 25 of the fifth report 1989-90 of the Social Services Select Committee, "Community Care: Carers."

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the Government's response to recommendation 25 of the fifth report of the Social Services Select Committee published in the Government's "Plans for the Future of Community Care"— CM 1343 at page 17.

Residential Homes

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will separately list for each of the last 10 years the sums of money paid by his Department to private and publicly owned residential homes for the elderly in support of their occupants.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not pay money to private or publicly owned residential homes for the elderly in support of their occupants.

The Department has paid the following amounts of income support or supplementary benefit to claimants in residential care homes.

Year	Annual expenditure (nearest £ million)
1981	23
1982	39
1983	104
1984	200
1985	259
1986	328
1987	438
1988	556
1989	658
1990	740

Notes:
1. The figures before 1985 include claimants in nursing homes.
2. Figures are not sufficiently reliable for the totals to be subdivided into elderly residents and others.

Information regarding amounts paid to people in publicly owned homes—part III—is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are now in receipt of income support, paid to them for the purpose of sustaining mortgage repayments.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Income support claimants with mortgage interest included in assessment

Year	Total
1989	281,000

Source: Annual statistical inquiry.
Note: Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total sum paid by his Department in 1990, and each of the preceding five years, to assist claimants with mortgage repayments.

Miss Widdecombe: Estimates of figures are given in the table.

Annual equivalent mortgage interest included in assessment of income support

Year	Total £ million
1989	355
1988	285
1987	335
1986	350
1984	220

Source: Annual statistical inquiry.
Note: No annual statistical inquiry was undertaken in 1985; data for 1983 are not available. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the highest sum, known to his Department, paid per week to assist any individual claimant with mortgage repayments.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not routinely collected. The 10 highest amounts added in the assessment of income support for mortgage interest identified by a 1 per cent. sample of cases are listed in the table in descending order:

[redacted]	*Weekly amount (£)*
	176·17
	174·98
	162·26
	160·63
	159·18
	157·58
	157·06
	148·43
	143·31
	142·01

Source: Annual Statistical Inquiry, May 1989.

Disabled People

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions his Department has had with organisations representing disabled people and carers concerning the impact of the community charge on disabled people and their carers.

Miss Widdecombe: We keep in close touch with representatives of disabled people and their carers about all social security issues. Additional help is focused on disabled people and their carers through the special premiums in the income-related benefit schemes, including community charge benefit.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase the Christmas bonus to pensioners for Christmas 1991 to reflect the movement in the retail prices index since 1972.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the impact of the community charge on disabled people and their carers.

Miss Widdecombe: Since April 1990, the Department has received over 3,000 items of correspondence about the community charge benefit scheme: it is not possible to identify the number relating particularly to the impact of the community charge on disabled people and their carers.

Benefits

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1991-92 of raising income support, community charge benefit and housing benefit personal allowances for people under 25 years to the level for those 25 years and over.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available, but I shall write to the hon. Member when it is.

Residential and Nursing Home Care

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to increase the limits paid for residential and nursing home care; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the uprating statement my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State made to the House on 24 October 1990 at columns 351-52.

Pensioners (Income)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the number of pensioners in the United Kingdom who have an income of up to *(a)* £5,000 annually, *(b)* £4,500, *(c)* £4,000 and *(d)* the number under this figure and the total percentage of pensioners whose income does not exceed £5,000 a year.

Mr. Jack [*holding answer 6 December 1990:* In 1987, The latest year for which analyses are available, the number of pensioner family units where the total net income was below the specified levels is estimated to be:

	Single pensioner	*Pensioner couples*
(a) below £5,000 per annum	3·8 million	0·8 million
(b) below £4,500 per annum	3·6 million	0·5 million
(c) below £4,000 per annum	3·4 million	0·2 million

The total number of pensioner units in the United Kingdom is estimated to be:

	Million
Single pensioners	4·4
Pensioner couples	2·5
Total	6·9

Note: The estimates are based on the net income of benefit units before housing costs. No account has been taken of the size of the family unit, nor of any income received by those living in separate benefit units in the same household.

The total percentage of pensioner units whose income does not exceed £5,000 a year is around 67 per cent.

Low Incomes

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the number of adult people in the United Kingdom who have an annual income of up to *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £4,500 and *(c)* £4,000.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* In 1987, the latest year for which analyses are available, the number of family units where the total net income was below the specified levels is estimated to be:

	Single adults million	*Couples million*
(a) below £5,000 per annum	10·9	1·8
(b) below £4,500 per annum	10·0	1·2
(c) below £4,000 per annum	8·7	0·7

Note: The estimates are based on the net income of benefit units before housing costs. No account has been taken of the size of the family unit, nor of any income received by those living in separate benefit units in the same household.

Incomes

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to make a substantial reply to the priority written questions of the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 6 December about pensioner and other adult incomes.

Mr. Jack: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the tables in the OPCS reports which indicate that people who need special diets will be likely to qualify for the lower care component of the disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 20 December 1990]:* The estimates of the eligible populations for the new components of the disability living allowance were derived from a detailed secondary analysis of the OPCS survey data; the eligible groups cannot be identified from the tables published in the OPCS reports. Our estimates do, however, suggest that around a quarter of those expected to qualify for the lower rate of the self-care component —some 60,000 people in all—need a special diet.

EMPLOYMENT

Sheltered Employment

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new money will be made available for the sheltered employment budget in the next year; and what was the number of *(a)* permits issued to employers, *(b)* inspections carried out by his Department under the quota scheme in each of the last five years, and *(c)* attempts to prosecute for failure to meet the quota, since 1960.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The 1990 public expenditure survey provides an additional £4·6 million for 1991-92 for the sheltered employment programme compared with the corresponding provision in last year's plans. With regard to the quota scheme:

(a) my Department does not keep information in the form requested. However, the number of employers issued with permits during the 12-month period ending 1 June was:

	Employers
1990	18,036
1989	18,530
1988	18,594
1987	18,577
1986	18,840

(b) The number of quota inspections carried out during the 12-month period ending in April was:

	Number
1990	1,903
1989	2,050
1988	2,273
1987	2,553
1986	2,360

(c) There have been six prosecutions for failure to meet quota since 1960: three in 1975 and one each in 1964, 1973 and 1974.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of unemployed claimants are dealt with by a caseload approach.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Employment Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of clients on employment training referred to training managers are not accepted and are referred back to training agents.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of current employment training trainees in training are on employer placements.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated that at 30 September 1990, the latest date for which information is available, about 25 per cent. of trainees were on practical training placements with employers.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are being taken to improve the quality of provision of training agents on employment training; and whether any extra resources are being provided for this.

Mr. Jackson: Training agents which contract direct with my Department are required to meet the exacting and stringent standards of the approved training organisation (ATO) criteria. I am satisfied that the resources provided are sufficient to meet these quality standards.

Training agents who contract with a training and enterprise council are required to meet the standards which the TEC sets out in its quality management strategy which are no less stringent than those of the approved training organisation criteria. The quality management strategy is an integral part of the training and enterprise council's corporate and business plans which are agreed with my Department and form the foundation of the contractual arrangements between the training and enterprise council and my Department. Training and enterprise council's also determine what resources are needed to maintain standards and provide value for money.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the percentage of training and enterprise council staff who were formerly civil servants.

Mr. Jackson: A total of 46 training and enterprise councils were operational at 14 January 1991. The number of staff who have resigned from the civil service to take up direct employment with their training and enterprise councils is four (0·2 per cent.). This compares with 2,455 (94 per cent.) seconded civil servants who are working for these training and enterprise councils.

Unskilled Workers

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the industrial work force is unskilled.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates from the 1989 labour force survey indicate that 5·2 per cent. of all people in employment in Great Britain were in unskilled occupations.

Mentally Ill People

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many mentally ill people are *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* in part-time employment and *(c)* in full-time employment, by sector.

Mr. Jackson: Information is not available in the form requested. A report of research commissioned by my Department's Employment Service and undertaken by Social and Community Planning Research contains some information on mentally ill people who are in employment or want work. A copy of the report, "Employment and Handicap", is in the Library.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement regarding his Department's policy on training and promotion of employment for the mentally ill.

Mr. Jackson: My Department provides a service for all people with disabilities treating each as an individual and identifying the most appropriate action. People who are mentally ill can use the full range of Employment Department services available to anyone with a disability who is capable of employment. The consultative document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", contains proposals and intentions to improve the effectiveness of these services.

My Department seeks to encourage employers to adopt and implement good policies and practices in the employment of people with disabilities. Through means such as the "Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People" and our two videos, "It Can Be Done" and "It Worked Fine", which are promoted to employers by the Disablement Advisory Service, we offer employers advice and guidance on employing all people with disabilities, including those who are mentally ill. In October 1990 my right hon. and learned Friend launched a new symbol which can be used by employers to show publicly that they are committed to good practices and to encourage people with disabilities in seeking and keeping employment. In addition, my Department has, in conjunction with the National Association for Mental Health (MIND), prepared a leaflet for employers advising how people with mental illness can be successfully integrated into the work force.

Employment opportunities for people with severe mental health problems are provided under my Department's sheltered employment programme and the Employment Service's employment rehabilitation network already includes a number of agencies which specialise in mental health.

In training, our objective is to encourage integrated provision where this is possible, but we also recognise that sometimes very particular expertise is necessary to make training a success.

That is why my Department, with the help of specialist organisations, has produced a guide for training people with disabilities which includes specific advice on the needs of people with mental health problems and how to respond to them. We have also sponsored a number of projects aimed at creating or enhancing training and assessment facilities at the local level. The job of further developing this provision is now primarily the responsibility of training and enterprise councils.

Job Clubs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of participants in the past 12 months left job clubs without a positive outcome.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Tourists

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to improve the quality of welcome to incoming tourists at airports and seaports.

Mr. Forth: The British Tourist Authority is pursuing the recommendations made in a recent study by Countess Spencer of the reception facilities at ports of entry.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of employed workers were employed in the service sector in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989 in the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany;

(2) what percentage of employed workers are employed in manufacturing industries in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989 in the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is shown in the table.

Civilian work force in employment[3]

	1979		*1989*	
	Civilian employment in the service sector	*Civilian employment in manufacturing industries*	*Civilian employment in the service sector*	*Civilian employment in manufacturing industries*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
United Kingdom	58·7	29·5	68·4	20·9
France	54·8	26·1	63·5	[1]21·6
Federal Republic of Germany	50·0	34·5	56·5	[2]32·2

[1] Latest figures available are for 1988.
[2] Latest figures available are for 1986.
[3] Civilian work force in employment consists of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants on work related Government training schemes. Major divisions of economic activity are defined in the Standard Industrial Classification 1980 (for the United Kingdom) and in the International Standard Industrial Classification (for France and the Federal Republic of Germany).
Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics 1968-1988 and OECD Quarterly Labour Force Statistics No. 4, 1990 except United Kingdom (ed.)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of employees in the service sector are married women in the *(a)* United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Jackson: The information is shown in the table.

Employees in employment[1]

	Per cent. of married women employed in the service sector in 1988[2]
United Kingdom	38·3
France	31·7
Federal Republic of Germany	26·3

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey Results 1988
[1]Major divisions of economic activity are defined in the Standard Industrial Classification 1980 (for the United Kingdom) and in the International Standard Industrial Classification (for France and the Federal Republic of Germany).
[2]Latest comparable figures available are for 1988

WALES

Water Quality

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has plans to improve the quality of Welsh water.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next proposes to meet the chairman of Welsh Water plc to discuss its targets for capital expenditure and compliance with statutory environmental limits.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department is regularly in touch with Welsh Water plc on a wide range of matters including its performance, and my right hon. Friend will certainly discuss these issues at any meeting with the company.

Community Charge

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of local authorities in Wales to dicuss the community charge.

Mr. David Hunt: I met the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, together with representatives of individual authorities on 7 January, for a very useful discussion on the finance, structure and functions of Welsh local government.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present number of unemployed males and females and the numbers recorded in May 1979; and what are his plans to reduce the figures.

Mr. David Hunt: In May 1979, on a seasonally adjusted basis, there were 49,800 male and 19,000 female unemployed claimants in Wales. In December 1990, these figures were 73,100 and 21,100 respectively. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which my hon. Friend the Minister of State gave to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) about the Government's plans to ameliorate the situation.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest number of people out of work *(a)* in the Merthyr and Rhymney constituency and *(b)* in Wales; and what action he proposes to create new job opportunities for those unemployed.

Mr. David Hunt: In December 1990, there were 3,360 and 95,662 unemployed claimants in the Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney constituency and Wales respectively. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which my hon. Friend the Minister of State gave to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) about the Government's plans to ameliorate the situation.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many men and women, full-time and part-time, were in employment in June 1979 at the latest date for which figures are available in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Mid Glamorgan.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest available figures show that there are more people in employment in Wales than ever before with a record 1,239,000 civilian work force in employment. In June 1979, there were 618,000, 250,000 and 165,000 male, full-time female and part-time female employees respectively in employment in Wales. A breakdown of numbers of full-time and part-time males is not available. By September 1990, totals were 525,000, 279,000 and 206,000 respectively. County data are not available for the period requested.

Unemployment

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss future levels of unemployment in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have regular discussions with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency about a range of matters concerning the development of the Welsh economy.

Eye Tests

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the *(a)* percentage fall and *(b)* fall in actual numbers of eye tests carried out under the NHS in Wales in the year following the introduction of charges for such tests over the previous year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is not available in the form requested. Statistics are available only in respect of sight tests for which no charge is made to the patient.

Hospital Incinerators

20. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are to be taken to eradicate harmful emissions from the chimneys of hospital incinerators in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Hospital incinerators currently in operation in Wales will lose Crown immunity from 1 April 1991, and will be subject to local authority control under the arrangements to be introduced by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Family Farms

21. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy for the future of family farms in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I recognise the importance of family farms within the structure of agriculture in Wales and their significance in social terms. I will continue to seek to ensure that these farms, along with others, are able to compete effectively and on equal terms within the single European market.

Brussels Office

22. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to establish a permanent Welsh office base in Brussels.

Mr. David Hunt: No. The Welsh Office is already in close and sustained contact with the European Commission and with the office of the United Kingdom permanent representation in Brussels, which represents the interest of all Government Departments. The present arrangements work well and are the most cost-effective means of representing Welsh interests in the Community.

Economy

23. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on prospects for the Welsh economy during 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: The progress of the Welsh economy in 1991 will be affected by world and United Kingdom conditions, which may lead to a fall in output and a rise in unemployment during the early part of the year. But this will be accompanied by a sharp fall in inflation and the successes of recent years mean that Wales is far better placed to cope with temporary difficulties and resume the growth path later in the year.

Local Government

24. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake a review of the structure of local government in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes, I am.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and would therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

Historic Monuments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will update the figures in his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly of 9 February 1990, *Official Report*, columns *809-10*, concerning CADW, providing the outturn for 1989-90 and the latest estimates for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is in the table:

£'000

	1989-90 outturn	*1990-91 estimate*	*1991-92 estimate*[1]
Historic buildings grants	2,779	3,138	3,027
Ancient monuments grants:			
Grants to owners	169	250	275
Grants to archaeological trusts	633	715	730
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Wales)	810	830	900
Civic Trust for Wales	25	25	25

[1]The provision for 1991-92 is subject to Treasury and Parliamentary approval.

Polytechnic of Wales

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce any changes in the structure of the Polytechnic of Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We expect to announce our decision on the recommendations of the Price Waterhouse report concerning the future status of the Polytechnic of Wales in the near future.

Community Charge Registers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the estimated cost for each change in poll tax registers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many changes there have been to poll tax registers in Wales as a result of population movement;

(3) if he will list in order the number of districts and boroughs in which there have been changes in poll tax registers;

(4) how much it costs to keep poll tax registers up to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The table shows the entries recorded by each authority in respect of the community charge register as at 1 December 1989 and as at 15 November 1990. These show the overall changes to the register rather than the number of changes there have been to community charge registers in Wales as a result of population movement.

The estimated cost for each change and the costs of updating the community charge register are not held centrally.

Total entries on the community charge register[1]

Local authority	*As at 1 December 1989*	*As at 15 November 1990*
Alyn and Deeside	56,482	56,615
Colwyn	45,525	44,516
Delyn	51,758	51,845
Glyndwr	33,728	33,472
Rhuddlan	45,200	45,266
Wrexham Maelor	92,437	90,111
Carmarthen	45,015	44,097
Ceredigion	53,190	55,941
Dinefwr	30,399	30,644
Llanelli	58,552	59,585
Preseli Pembrokeshire	54,152	54,111
South Pembroke	33,329	33,420
Blaenau Gwent	60,113	59,560
Islwyn	50,668	51,348
Monmouth	60,217	60,180
Newport	103,309	103,609
Torfaen	69,720	69,162
Aberconwy	42,778	42,806
Arfon	45,529	44,972
Dwyfor	24,319	23,868
Meirionnydd	29,649	29,168
Ynys Môn	52,699	53,965
Cynon Valley	50,690	51,095
Merthyr Tydfil	45,111	45,902
Ogwr	104,800	104,226
Rhondda	61,460	61,095
Rhymney Valley	78,780	78,346
Taff Ely	73,805	74,608
Brecknock	33,025	32,515
Montgomeryshire	41,867	42,282
Radnor	18,501	18,974
Cardiff	223,133	222,050
Vale of Glamorgan	84,975	85,847
Port Talbot	40,384	39,756
Lliw Valley	47,818	48,286
Neath	51,248	51,239
Swansea	142,003	142,917
TOTAL WALES	2,236,368	2,237,399

[1] Includes personal community chargepayers, students, persons subject to the collective community charge and standard community charge properties.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1990 reported by the National Museum of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1989.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A total of 672,064 people visited the National Museum of Wales during 1990, an increase of 39 per cent. on the attendance reported for 1989.

Education and Training

Mr. Denzilk Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in the latest available year how many 16 to 18-year-olds in Wales participated in full-time education and training.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There were 68,885 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education and training in the 1989-90 academic year.

Mathematics

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in the latest available year what percentage of all school children taking GCSE in Wales sat the examination in mathematics; and what percentage of those sitting the examination in mathematics obtained grades of C and above.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In the summer examinations of 1990, a total of 81 per cent. of Welsh Joint Education Committee GCSE candidates sat an examination in mathematics at centres in schools. Of these, 38·4 per cent. achieved grades A to C.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in the latest available year, what percentage of pupils taking the A-level examinations in Wales took the examination in mathematics.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In the summer examinations of 1990, a total of 26·2 per cent. of candidates sitting Welsh Joint Education Committee A-level examinations at centres in schools sat an examination in mathematics.

National Health Service

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all documents of advice or guidance, all consultative documents, all circulars and all other publications produced by his Department since 1 April 1990 in respect of *(a)* the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act, *(b)* the implementation of other aspects of Government policy towards the national health service and *(c)* any other matters relating to the health service in Wales; and if he will also list any such documents produced jointly with other Departments and any such documents which have been produced by other Government Departments, but which have any application to Wales, during the same period.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comprehensive list of working papers and associated material pursuant to the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, which is updated quarterly and placed in the Vote Office and Libraries. The further information could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Welshpool Bypass

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Welshpool bypass to be *(a)* started and *(b)* completed; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Start of work on the Welshpool scheme has been delayed by statutory procedures. Information on the timing of this scheme will be included in the Welsh Office departmental report and the supplement to "Roads in Wales" to be published shortly.

Newtown Bypass

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals for the construction of a Newtown bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have carried out a study of traffic in the Newtown area and the information obtained will be carefully considered to assess the need for a bypass.

Countess of Chester Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of patients from north Wales who used the Countess of Chester hospital annually for *(a)* surgery and *(b)* physiotherapy.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A total of 5,834 episodes of in-patient and day case care were received by residents from Clwyd and Gwynedd in the Countess of Chester hospital in 1989-90. Information on whether or not these episodes involved surgery is not held centrally. Information on the number attending that hospital for physiotherapy is not available.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what body will be responsible for the purchase of health services for the people of Pembrokeshire if the Pembrokeshire district health authority is turned into a national health service trust.

Mr. David Hunt: This will be for consideration if Pembrokeshire health authority decides to submit an application to form a Pembrokeshire health service trust.

Travel Concessions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether he will establish a scheme in Wales of assistance for retirement pensioners to travel free on road and rail transport at off-peak hours;

(2) whether he will establish a scheme in Wales of assistance for retirement pensioners to travel at concessionary rates of 75 per cent. or 66 per cent. on road and rail transport in off-peak hours.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to change the present arrangements. Local authorities already have adequate powers to provide travel concessions in their areas and most local authorities in Wales operate concessionary fares schemes for travel on local public transport. Both British Rail and the main long-distance coach operators have their own travel concession arrangements.

Leukaemia Patients

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make extra financial provision available to consultants at the bone marrow transplant unit at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, to fund the prescription of the drug Alpha Interferon to leukaemia patients.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: South Glamorgan health authority is already appropriately funded for the cost of drugs for the approved regional bone marrow transplant programme.

Jobs

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had during the past two months with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency about the provision of new jobs for the safeguarding of existing jobs in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have regular discussions with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency about a range of matters concerning the development of the Welsh economy.

HEALTH

Abortions

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest figures he has received for abortions as a percentage of all conceptions *(a)* in England and Wales, *(b)* for each Thames regional health authority and *(c)* for each London district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available information, for 1988, is shown in the table. The figures show the proportion of conceptions terminated by abortion under the 1967 Abortion Act; those which led to an illegal or a spontaneous abortion are excluded. Figures for district health authorities are not available centrally.

Percentage of conceptions terminated by abortion under the 1967 Abortion Act

Area of usual residence of women	*Number*
England and Wales	19·7
Regional Health Authorities	
North West Thames	25·8
North East Thames	27·5
South East Thames	24·4
South West Thames	23·0

Health Expenditure

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide *(a)* the total gross allocation to England for health expenditure in the year 1991-92, *(b)* a breakdown of the revenue and capital allocation components of the total gross allocation and *(c)* a breakdown of the total gross allocation, and the revenue and capital allocation components of it, for each of the English regional health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not yet available in the form requested. The table sets out the main revenue and capital allocations to regional health authorities for 1991-92.

£ millions

Region	*Revenue allocation*	*Capital allocation*	*Total allocation*
Northern	985·3	76·5	1,061·8
Yorkshire	1,121·0	89·1	1,210·1
Trent	1,406·5	112·3	1,518·8
East Anglian	595·7	49·1	644·9
North West Thames	1,097·2	75·7	1,172·9
North East Thames	1,295·5	86·2	1,381·7
South East Thames	1,221·2	89·0	1,310·2
South West Thames	946·8	69·4	1,016·2
Wessex	872·1	73·9	946·0
Oxford	675·4	55·0	730·4
South Western	1,000·0	81·6	1,081·6
West Midlands	1,566·8	131·4	1,698·2
Mersey	775·2	60·0	835·2
North Western	1,295·0	104·1	1,399·1
All RHAs	14,853·7	1,153·5	16,007·2

Notes:
1. Totals may not add due to rounding.
2. The table shows allocations for resident populations and excludes allocations for special purposes, some which will be made later.
3. An adjustment will be made to regions' capital allocation in respect of the NHS trust programme.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average waiting period for women being screened for breast cancer and the average period of time for the results to be made known in *(a)* Sunderland, *(b)* Durham and *(c)* Hartlepool.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the health authorities concerned.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

National Health Service Laundries

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request the Audit Commission to carry out a study of the true costs of laundry services provided by national health service laundries.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We will bear the suggestion in mind in discussions with the Audit Commission on its future programme.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Dorrell: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Dorrell: the time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the Department of Health. Estimates are made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold (currently £250). Following an inter-departmental exercise in 1972, an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the costs of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs. This figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for any variation in the designation or standards relating to Orcon levels of response for ambulance services.

Mr. Dorrell: Response times have always been recommended rather than mandatory and will remain so. The management executive recently issued a guide to good practice in the ambulance service which included a re-classification of services which are now termed urban or rural dependent upon population density. New emergency response standards for urban services have been slightly relaxed in recognition of increased traffic density; standards for rural services have been slightly tightened because of improved road networks. Non-emergency transport standards are now for local discretion based on the requirements of clinicians and unit managers. The guide to good practice is available in the Library.

Environmental Health Officers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many environmental health officers are currently in post; what is his estimate of the cost; how many additional environmental health officers he estimates will be required to implement the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1991; and what is the estimated additional cost;

(2) how environmental health officers were consulted before the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations were drafted; and what responses were received;

(3) how the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations will be enforced; and what is his estimate of the cost to central and local government.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on numbers of environmental health officers in post is not collected centrally. It is for local authorities to consider how best to deploy their resources to enforce food safety requirements. In doing so they will take into account priority areas of concern. No funds have been made available centrally specifically for the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990. The Government have made available to local authorities £30 million for extra enforcement responsibilities placed on them under the Food Safety Act 1990 dealing with improvements in food safety generally.

A draft of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 was issued for consultation in July 1989 to a wide range of organisations including local authorities. Many comments were received on various aspects of the regulations, including their enforcement. The regulations were made in July 1990.

Guidelines on how the regulations affect industry and on how they will be enforced have also been widely consulted upon and will be issued in final form very shortly.

Smoked Meat and Fish

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the definitive draft of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations will be available; and when guidelines for the smoked meat and fish industry will be issued.

Mr. Dorrell: The regulations were made on 16 July 1990 and laid before Parliament on 18 July 1990. They come into force in stages from 1 April 1991. Copies are available in the Library.

A consultation exercise on guidelines describing the implications of the regulations for all sectors of industry and for enforcement officers has just been completed. Final guidelines will be issued very shortly.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of food poisoning have been traced to smoked salmon in the past three years; and in how many cases had the smoked salmon been delivered by post;

(2) how far negotiations concerning the implementation of the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations have progressed with the smoked meat and fish industry; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many cases of food poisoning have been traced to smoked meat and fish delivered by post in the last five years;

(4) how many cases of food poisoning have been traced to smoked meat and fish in the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: Most cases of food poisoning are sporadic and it is not usually possible to identify a vehicle of infection for a specific case. Routine statistics on sporadic cases are therefore unhelpful in identifying particular foods as vehicles of infection—whether they have been in the post or not.

The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 introduce temperature controls for foods which should be kept chilled because they may contain pathogenic micro-organisms which, if not controlled by chilling, can grow rapidly and become a threat to health.

Research is taking place to see how the mail order trade, including smoked fish, can best adapt to the new regulations and we expect to be in a position to consider results with colleagues in MAFF, Scottish Office and the Welsh Office shortly.

Population Statistics

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest estimate of the population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest estimate of resident population in the United Kingdom (relating to mid 1989) is 57·2 millions.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the projections, by percentage, of the population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the years (i) 2000, (ii) 2010 and (iii) 2020 for those *(a)* aged 101 or over, *(b)* aged between 91 and 100 years, *(c)* aged between 81 and 90 years, *(d)* aged between 71 and 80 years and *(e)* aged between 61 and 70 years.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information based on the 1989-based projections of resident population produced by the Government Actuary's Department is as follows:

Age last birthday	*Percentage of projected United Kingdom population in the year*		
	2000	*2010*	*2020*
61 to 70	9·0	10·5	10·8
71 to 80	7·0	6·6	7·9
81 to 89	2·8	3·2	3·2
90 and over	0·6	0·7	0·8

Population figures for the United Kingdom cannot be reliably projected by single years of age beyond the age of 90.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the total population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is *(a)* aged 101 years and over, *(b)* aged between 91 and 100 years, *(c)* aged between 81 and 90 years, *(d)* aged between 71 and 80 years and *(e)* aged between 61 and 70 years.

Mr. Dorrell: The information available, based upon mid 1989 estimates of resident population, is as follows:

Age	*Percentage of total resident United Kingdom population*
61 to 70	9·9
71 to 80	6·7
81 to 89	2·7
90+	0·4

Population figures by single year of age cannot be estimated reliably above the age of 90.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the district health authorities in England which have expressed an interest in opting out to become a national health service trust on an all-authority basis and indicate which of these he is allowing to proceed into the process of public consultation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has agreed that 123 hospitals and other units can proceed to work up applications to become trusts on 1 April 1992. These expressions of interest will only proceed to public consultation if a formal application for trust status is submitted. Of these expressions of interest, 12 provide all the services currently managed within their respective health authorities. They are;

Darlington health services.
North Tees acute and community services.
North West Durham hospital and community services.
Airedale Health Services.
Harrogate Health Services.
Northallerton Health Services.
Scarborough Health Services.
East Hertfordshire Acute, Priority and Community Services.
Hastings Provider Services.
Wycombe Health Services.
Oldham Acute and Community Services.
Rochdale Acute and Community Services.

St. Paul's Hospital, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ophthalmic cases have been dealt with at St. Paul's eye hospital, Liverpool, over the past decade; from what radius they are drawn; what are the annual running costs of the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the future of the hospital.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We do not hold this information centrally. The Liverpool health authority is at present consulting on the proposed closure of the hospital and the future provision of eye services in Liverpool. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Michael Emberton, the authority chairman, for details.

Social Work

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to increase recruitment of social workers and to promote social work as a career; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The primary responsibility for ensuring an adequate, suitably trained work force rests with employers. There is no legislative basis for ministerial involvement in a recruitment campaign for social workers, where the major employers are local authorities. However, the Department has taken steps to assist interested parties to develop better work force analysis systems and, following a meeting with the Association of Directors of Social Services last year, the Department will be funding a one day seminar this spring to bring together all those with work force interests, to identify key issues and discuss future action.

GPs (Home Visits)

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what right an NHS patient has to seek a home visit by their general practitioner; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Where, in a GP's clinical judgement, a patient's condition is such that a home visit is needed then the GP is required to make such a visit under the terms of service.

Since 1 April 1990, a GP visiting his or her patient between the hours of 10 pm and 8 am may claim a fee of some £45. If such a visit is delegated by the GP to a deputy then £15 may be claimed.

GPs, Barnsley

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the practices covered by the Barnsley family practitioner committee have met the general practitioners' new contract for *(a)* cervical cytology and *(b)* child immunisation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 30 September 1990, 100 per cent. of the GPs, and therefore all of the practices, covered by Barnsley family health services authority qualified for either a higher or lower target payment in respect of both cervical cytology and childhood immunisation. My congratulations to all concerned for this excellent achievement.

Eyesight Tests

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the impact of charging for eyesight tests in Trent regional health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of national health service sight tests paid for in 1988-89 and 1989-90 by family health services authorities in Trent regional health authority was as follows:

NHS sight tests
1988-89: 1,166,700
1989-90 (after entitlement was restricted to certain groups): 514,960

After 1 April 1989, many patients in Trent, as elsewhere, will have had a private eye examination.

Departmental statistics are not kept on private sight tests. An independent NOP survey commissioned by the

Department indicated that the national total number of sight tests (private and national health service) during the first quarter of 1990 was at the level that would have been expected if trends up to 1987 had been projected forwards.

Residential Homes

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many aged people were living in residential homes in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the number of residents aged 65 and over in local authority and registered homes for elderly and for younger physically handicapped people as at 31 March.

Year	*England total*
1981	160,965
1982	165,675
1983	172,208
1984	180,578
1985	193,487
1986	204,382
1987	209,801
1988	219,175
1989	232,527
1990	[1]232,025

[1] Provisional data.

SCOTLAND

Smoked Fish

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the results of research into the processing of smoked fish and how the industry might comply with the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations affecting the sending of smoked salmon and trout through the post; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The results of research commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are expected shortly. Together with colleagues in MAFF and the Department of Health, we shall consider the results and any implications for the food hygiene regulations.

Civil Penalties

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of civil penalties imposed during the last year for which figures are available by each assessor in Scotland in respect of non-return of land valuation schedules prior to the abolition of the domestic rating system.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Assessors have no powers to impose civil penalties in these situations. Any person failing to furnish a return to the assessor is liable to a penalty not exceeding £400, following prosecution at the instance of the procurator fiscal. Information on the number of such cases is not held centrally.

Health Service

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what communication he has received from Greater Glasgow south-west local health council concerning the local health council scheme submitted to him by Greater Glasgow health board; what consideration he has given to the issues raised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The local health council wrote to me on 20 December asking me to ensure that Greater Glasgow health board was aware of the need for a strong local voice on the NHS. This point is well understood by the board, which has submitted a scheme for restructuring local health councils in their area. This is being considered.

Data Sales

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will describe the circumstances, and the charges involved, when the sale of names and addresses from publicly available community charge information is allowed; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Section 20(6) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 provides that a person shall be entitled to obtain a copy, or a copy certified by or on behalf of the community charges registration officer, of any entry in the register which he is entitled to inspect. A fee of £1 per register entry is prescribed for this purpose.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Lang: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures.

These measures are kept under review.

Physiotherapy

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of whole-time equivalent physiotherapists under contract to each of the health board areas in Scotland shown as a rate per 100,000 head of population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the table:

Physiotherapists in post by health board; whole time equivalent as at 30 September 1990 (provisional)

Health board	*Whole time equivalent*	*Rate per 100,000 population*[1]
Argyll and Clyde	77·5	18
Ayrshire and Arran	93·2	25
Borders	27·3	27
Dumfries and Galloway	23·6	16
Fife	79·0	23
Forth Valley	57·4	21
Grampian	115·7	23
Greater Glasgow	307·5	33
Highland	51·6	26
Lanarkshire	110·4	20
Lothian	217·1	29
Orkney	5·0	26
Shetland	6·0	27

Health board	Whole time equivalent	Rate per 100,000 population[1]
Tayside	92·0	23
Western Isles	10·6	35

[1] Based on estimated population figures at 30 June 1989.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of whole-time equivalent physiotherapy aides under contract to the Borders health board for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Physiotherapy aides in post in the Borders health board; whole-time equivalents as at 30 September

Year	Whole time equivalents
1986	3·6
1987	2·6
1988	2·9
1989	2·9
1990	[1]3·0

[1]Provisional.

Rural Health Boards

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance is planned to enable health boards in rural areas of Scotland to provide adequate levels of service in all medical areas covered by the professions allied to medicine.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A manpower steering group for the professions allied to medicine was established in June 1990 with the task of advising on the development of manpower planning at local level and at national level for the professions allied to medicine.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of whole-time equivalent professionally qualified physiotherapists under contract to the Borders health board for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Physiotherapists in post in the Borders health board; whole-time equivalents as at 30 September

Year	Whole-time equivalents
1986	19·8
1987	20·8
1988	27·0
1989	24·9
1990	[1]27·3

[1]Provisional.

Education and Training

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in the latest available year, how many 16 to 18-year-olds participated in full-time education and training.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There were 76,100 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education and 42,600 on the youth training scheme in Scotland in 1989.

Mentally Handicapped People

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to amend the statutory notes within the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988, No. 1539) to give effect to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which extended exemption from the community charge to those who are severely mentally impaired by reason of degenerative conditions.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These notes are amended by the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) (No. 2) Amendment Regulations 1991 which were made on 14 January and which will be laid before Parliament on 28 January. The notes have no bearing upon the operation of the changes to the arrangements for exempting the severely mentally impaired which came into force on 29 December 1989 with backdated effect, by virtue of the Personal Community Charge (Exemption for the Severely Mentally Impaired) (Scotland) Regulations 1989.

Scotland Europa Ltd.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what public relations advisers and management consultants are retained by his office in relation to Scotland Europa Ltd.; what fees they are paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No public relations advisers or management consultants are retained by the Scottish Office in relation to Scotland Europa.

Destiny

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to examine the question of safety and implement any recommendations arising from the inquiry into the Destiny disaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Sheriff's determination following a fatal accident inquiry into the drowning accident involving the Destiny on 16 December 1989 was issued on 14 November 1990. A report by the Department of Transport marine accident investigation branch has also been prepared and a summary of that report will be published shortly. The recommendations contained in both reports are being carefully considered by Government Departments with an interest in these matters, including the Scottish Office, although the question of safety at sea is principally a matter for the Department of Transport.

Local Health Councils

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to respond to the revised scheme for the provision of local health councils within the Highland health board area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Schemes for local health councils have been submitted by 12 health boards, including Highland. These are currently being considered.

Access Funds

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the amounts each individual college will receive in access funds under the Education (Further and Higher Education Institutions Access Funds) (Scotland) Regulations 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is set out in the table and relates to Session 1990-91. Colleges in the grant-aided and further education sectors are listed separately.

	£
Central institutions/Colleges of education	
Craigie College of Education	9,551
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	46,871
Dundee Institute of Technology	78,147
Edinburgh College of Art	50,229
Glasgow Polytechnic	107,359
Glasgow School of Art	42,421
Jordanhill College of Education	46,097
Moray House College of Education	43,419
Napier Polytechnic	201,953
Northern College of Education	35,063
Paisley College of Technology	107,770
Queen Margaret College	49,826
Queens College, Glasgow	37,014
The Robert Gordon Institute of Technology	135,745
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	21,897
St. Andrews College of Education	19,283
Scottish Agricultural Colleges	17,628
Scottish College of Textiles	23,291
Further education colleges	
Borders	
Borders College of Further Education	10,255
Central	
Clackmannan College of Further Education	15,803
Falkirk College of Technology	27,645
Dumfries and Galloway	
Dumfries and Galloway College of Technology	15,669
The Barony College	2,148
Fife	
Elmwood Agricultural and Technical College	6,097
Fife College of Technology	41,304
Glenrothes and Buckhaven Technical College	12,294
Lauder College	7,593
Grampian	
Aberdeen College of Commerce	36,019
Aberdeen Technical College	10,841
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	15,715
Clinterty Agricultural College	3,457
Highland	
Inverness College of Further and Higher Education	28,097
Moray College of Further Education	28,754
Thurso Technical College	5,448
Lothian	
Jewel and Esk Valley College	27,471
Oatridge Agricultural College	2,043
Stevenson College	32,237
Telford College of Further Education	43,516
West Lothian College of Further Education	12,336
Orkney	
Stromness Nautical College	471
Shetland	
Shetland College of Further Education	2,200
Strathclyde	
Anniesland College	11,200
Ayr College	28,059
Barmulloch College	8,957
Bell College of Technology	53,325
Cambuslang College	13,446
Cardonald	45,088
Central College of Commerce	25,575
Clydebank College	57,807
Coatbridge College	20,828
Cumbernauld College	15,471
Glasgow College of Building and Printing	39,696
Glasgow College of Food Technology	22,498
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	14,742
James Watt College	25,973
John Wheatley College	13,305
Kilmarnock College	24,121
Langside College	42,781
Motherwell College	29,209
Reid Kerr College	32,445
Springburn College	9,481
Stow College	20,056
Angus College of Further Education	12,009
Dundee College of Further Education	76,009
Perth College of Further Education	23,808
Western Isles	
Lews Castle College	6,214

SCOTLAND

Erythropoietin

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that prescriptions for erythropoietin are not affected by any health board overspend on their drug budgets.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* Health boards are responsible for ensuring that patients receive proper and sufficient treatment according to clinical judgment and hospital funding is formulated taking into account the cost of providing drugs. There are therefore no financial reasons why Erythropoietin cannot be prescribed.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made towards the provision of an additional intensive therapy unit facility and additional operating theatre at the Foresterhill hospital's unit in Aberdeen.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* Grampian health board is currently progressing a scheme to replace its existing theatres and intensive therapy facilities with a modern seven-theatre complex at Foresterhill.

Sub-Standard Housing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to assist district council tenants and former district council tenants now owner-occupiers who are unable to buy, or sell, their homes because they have been classified by building societies as being sub-standard; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* The Government make available resources

to local authorities to assist private owners of houses designated as defective under part XIV of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and sold by a public sector authority before a cut-off date specified in the designation. Assistance is available towards the repair, demolition and rebuilding, or repurchase by the local authority of the defective house in these cases.

As regards other houses, council tenants who wish to purchase their houses should satisfy themselves in the first instance that the risks they are taking are acceptable, seeking professional advice if necessary. It is for building societies or other financial institutions advancing loans towards the purchase of properties to make decisions on whether to provide finance for any purchase and it would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in such decisions.

The Government also make substantial resources available to local authorities for them to provide grants for the improvement and repair of private housing. The provisional allocations to local authorities for the non-housing revenue account block in 1991-92 announced on 20 December total over £105 million.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list all the hospitals in Scotland which provide full facilities for the screening of breast cancer and the total number of patients screened for each year since 1979;

(2) what proportion of health service funds were spent on providing facilities for breast cancer screening for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* Facilities for screening are not provided in hospitals but by a mix of seven static screening and assessment units and nine mobile screening units. The assessment units take the women who have been found to have a positive basic screen to the point of diagnosis. When a diagnosis demonstrates that treatment is required, the patient is referred to the hospital which has the most appropriate facilities for this treatment.

The total number of patients screened since the establishment of the breast screening service is as follows:

	Number
1987-88	297
1988-89	3,953
1989-90	45,153

The Government have provided both revenue and capital funds centrally to establish the breast cancer screening service, as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	0·5
1988-89	1·6
1989-90	4·7
1990-91	3·5

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of local authority expenditure *(a)* as a whole and *(b)* on housing is (i) paid for by central Government and (ii) paid for by local government.

Mr. Key: In 1990-91 central Government support for local authorities (including that from the non-domestic ratepayer and credit approvals) is estimated to be 80 per cent. and self financed expenditure (less debt interest payment) is estimated to be 20 per cent. of the local authority component of general Government expenditure (less debt interest payment) in England.

The Government's planned resource provision for local authority capital spending on housing in England in 1991-92 is £1·9 billion. This represents about 64 per cent. of the capital expenditure which local authorities could finance from a combination of this provision and their own resources. Local authorities also receive subsidy to cover the shortfall assumed to arise in their housing revenue account if they adhere to the Government's rent and management and maintenance guidelines. Provision of £3·5 billion has been made for this purpose on 1991-92, which represents about 44 per cent. of local authorities housing revenue account expenditure. The balance is financed by income from rents.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how his Department defines *(a)* small, *(b)* medium and *(c)* large-scale users of refuse-derived fuel in terms of tonnes used per annum; and if he will outline the way in which derogation arrangements will affect each, over the coming years;

(2) if he will make a statement on the derogation arrangements that will apply for those industries proposing to use recycled, refined, refuse-derived fuel;

(3) if he will outline the derogation arrangements for refuse-derived fuel use over the next five years.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on derogation arrangements governing the use and development of refuse-derived fuels (RDF).

Mr. Baldry: The Department is preparing regulations to implement the EC directive on municipal waste incineration. The power to derogate for plant burning RDF will be included in these regulations, and the regulations will be subject to consultation.

Under the Environmental Protection Act it is proposed that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will be responsible for the integrated pollution control of plants burning refuse derived fuel (RDF). In line with a commitment during the Committee stage of the Environmental Protection Bill, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is now drafting guidance specific to the burning of RDF including questions of derogation and plant size. Guidance will be published well in advance of existing RDF burning plant coming under control. The industry will be fully consulted in the production of this guidance.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken concerning discharge of the responsibilities of the chief executive of the London Docklands Development Corporation; what remit has been given to any persons concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Staffing matters are for the corporation, which has appointed the chairman as acting chief executive. My Department has appointed LDDC's director of finance as accounting officer, until the appointment of the new chief executive.

Wheelchair Access

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set up a capital fund to provide local authorities and other statutory agencies with resources with a view to enabling all major public buildings to be made accessible to people in wheelchairs by 1995;

(2) if he will estimate the capital cost of providing unrestricted wheelchair access to all major public buildings such as libraries, schools and hospitals.

(3) what detailed plans he has to assist local authorities to accelerate their existing programme of work to improve access to public buildings by people in wheelchairs;

(4) what central Government finance is being made available to increase access to public buildings by people in wheelchairs.

Mr. Yeo: I have no plans to set up a capital fund of the kind the hon. Member has in mind. Regardless of financial resources, it is not always practicable, particularly in the case of listed historic buildings, to provide unrestricted wheelchair access to existing public buildings such as libraries, schools and hospitals. Where it is feasible to provide such access the cost will vary according to circumstances, and no realistic estimate of the overall capital cost can be made.

Access for wheelchair users and other people with disabilities to all storeys of new shops and offices and the entrance storeys of other new non-domestic buildings is a requirement of the present building regulations. There is also a requirement not to adversely affect standards of access for disabled people when altering such buildings.

My Department is currently consulting on proposals to increase the scope of the regulations to include the upper storeys of a broader range of new multi-storey buildings, some extensions to existing buildings and major reconstructions behind retained facades and to include facilities for the benefit of people with sight and hearing impairments. Thereafter as part of a phased approach, we shall be assessing ways of extending the scope of the regulations to require provision for people with disabilities when, with respect to non-domestic buildings, proposals are made for types of alteration or extension not previously included within the regulations.

A variety of initiatives aimed at improving access for people with disabilities in existing public buildings has been launched by my own and other Government Departments since 1981; a list of them has been placed in the Library in response to the question recently put by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) (*Official Report*, 14 December 1990, column *517*).

In 1989 the Government gave £150,000 to the Carnegie trusts ADAPT fund for the improvement of facilities for disabled people in arts venues. I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by the Minister for the Arts to questions recently put by the hon. Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) (*Official Report*, 29 November 1990, column *462*). My Department has no proposals to set up a similar fund for making other public buildings accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to assist local authorities to provide additional public toilets which are adapted for use by people in wheelchairs.

Mr. Yeo: Under a contract placed by my Department, British Market Research Bureau Limited is currently carrying out a research project on sanitary provision for people with special needs. I plan to make the report available to local authorities during the course of this year. A major feature of it will be detailed information on the needs of wheelchair users with regard to the planning, design and equipping of public toilets.

Private Sector Leasing

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision was made in the 1990-91 revenue support grant settlement for costs associated with private sector leasing; and if he will make a statement on his current proposals for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: The standard spending assessments on which distribution of revenue support grant is based do not make a separately identifiable provision for private sector leasing. The overall local government finance settlements for 1990-91 and 1991-92 do however allow for the cost of providing short-term accommodation outside the housing revenue account.

Advertising

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been spent by his Department in 1989-90 and 1990-91 on *(a)* advertising community charge rebates, *(b)* advertising the transitional relief scheme and *(c)* advertising the sale of water companies.

Mr. Heseltine: In 1989-90 my Department spent approximately £4 million on advertising the availability of community charge benefit and transitional relief, with advertisements targeted at those who needed to know. It is not possible to apportion this total between, respectively, benefit and relief. Departmental expenditure on advertising the availability of shares in the water companies was approximately £16·5 million, with the aim of encouraging wide share ownership among the general public.

No money has been spent on similar advertising this year, but the Department has continued to produce and distribute free leaflets about the availability of community charge benefit and transitional relief. Leaflets are now in preparation to publicise the availability of the new community charge reduction scheme which I announced on 17 January.

Local Authorities (Income)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local authority for 1990-91 the income received from *(a)* poll tax, *(b)* national non-domestic rates and *(c)* Government grant.

Mr. Portillo: I am arranging for copies of the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total income to local authorities from *(a)* domestic rates and *(b)* non-domestic rates in each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1989-90, respectively.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:

England

Year	*Domestic*[1] *£ million*	*Non-domestic*[2] *£ million*
1979-80	2,504	3,354
1980-81	3,251	4,194
1981-82	4,034	5,013
1982-83	4,548	5,685
1983-84	4,382	6,042
1984-85	4,707	6,361
1985-86	5,094	6,740
1986-87	5,912	7,566
1987-88	6,539	8,088
1988-89	7,689	8,819
[3]1989-90	8,498	9,607

[1] Net of domestic rate relief grant and rate rebates.
[2] Net of rate rebates.
[3] Provisional.

Single Homeless People

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the numbers of single homeless people in *(a)* Sunderland district, *(b)* Easington district and *(c)* Hartlepool district.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985. The information provided does not identify those who are single and my Department has no estimates.

Local Government Manpower

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the manpower statistics for Shropshire county council and Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council for 1978-79 and 1989-90.

Mr. Key: The information is as follows:—

Staffing levels at June

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
Shropshire County Council			
1979[1]	7,855	6,341	14,196
1989	7,381	7,677	15,058
1990	7,412	8,371	15,783
Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council			
1979[1]	576	104	680
1989	635	89	724
1990	631	87	718

Source: Joint Staffing Watch for England
[1] Earliest available data.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Heseltine: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

Rents into Mortgages

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of his rents into mortgages scheme in Basildon; if he will indicate the discount given in relation to size of mortgage; and if he has made an assessment of the cost of implementing such a scheme across the United Kingdom at levels of take-up in 10 per cent. bands.

Mr. Yeo: The scheme is for tenants of the Commission for the New Towns at Basildon who would like to buy their home and who pay their full rent but cannot afford the right to buy. They can buy their home for a minimum initial payment of the amount they could borrow on a mortgage with repayments equivalent to their rent. This initial payment will attract discount in accordance with the right-to-buy rules; tenants paying half the right-to-buy price will get half their right-to-buy discount.

The Commission will retain a charge over that part of the value of the property not covered by the tenant's payment and discount. The charge may be redeemed at any time, but must be redeemed if the property is sold or, normally, on the death of the purchaser. The amount needed to redeem the charge will be the appropriate proportion of the property's value at the time of redemption, normally less a discount of 20 per cent.

No proposal for a national scheme has been announced.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current advice given by his Department to local planning authorities on the control of new built development in the vicinity of existing and former landfill tips.

Mr. Yeo: The Government's advice to local planning authorities about planning control relating to landfill sites is set out in my Department's circular 17/89 "Landfill Sites: Development Control", issued in July 1989. This makes clear that authorities should exercise due caution in considering planning applications for development on or near such sites, and that in preparing and updating their

development plans they should take full account of the implications of the presence of landfill sites for other types of development in the vicinity.

Household Incomes

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the proportion of net income after rebates, adjusted for family size, households paid in domestic rates in 1988-89 and pay in the community charge in 1990-91, broken down into (i) decile groups and (ii) bands of equivalent income.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not currently available. The analysis of domestic rates paid in 1988 should become avilable in the spring but the corresponding analysis of community charges paid by households over a full year will not be available until after the 1991 family expenditure survey has been processed.

Sand and Gravel

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from county councils about the development of sand and gravel quarries in environmentally sensitive areas; and what has been his response to such representations.

Mr. Yeo: No specific representations about this have been recently received from county councils. The Government policy and advice on mineral extraction in environmentally important areas is given in minerals planning guidance note 6 "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales."

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current forecasts for sand and gravel production for each year to the end of the century; and what is the existing annual production.

Mr. Yeo: My Department does not produce annual forecasts for the production of sand and gravel. A long term national forecast of the demand for aggregates (which includes sand and gravel) was published in March 1989 in minerals planning guidance note 6. It is our intention to publish a revised forecast shortly.

Production of land-won sand and gravel in England and Wales in 1989 was 98·5 million tonnes.

Warwickshire County Council

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of the opportunities available to reduce the £2 million difference between Warwickshire police authority's plans for reduced spending in 1991-92 on the police service and the Department of the Environment's standard spending assessment for the police service in Warwickshire;

(2) what assessment he has made of the opportunities available to reduce the £2·4 million difference between Warwickshire county council's plans for spending in 1991-92 on the fire and rescue service and his Department's standard spending assessment for the fire service in the county.

Mr. Key: Standard spending assessments are the Government's assessment of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure by each local authority taking account of its physical, demographic and social characteristics, consistent with a standard level of service, and the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure for all local authorities. It is for each local authority to determine its own spending plans for particular services, bearing in mind its statutory responsibilities and the scope for greater efficiency.

Aggregates

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to promote the development of mineral sidings in English counties to allow bulk haul of aggregates.

Mr. Yeo: The advice set out in minerals planning guidance note 6 is that rail transport can offer environmental advantages for long haul movements of aggregates. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is able to make grants available under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 to facilitate the transfer of aggregates traffic from road to rail.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to promote the exploitation of sea-based aggregates.

Mr. Yeo: The Government policy on the use of marine dredged sand and gravel is set out in minerals planning guidance note 6. This recognises that it has a very important role to play in maintaining supplies of aggregates and, as far as possible, its use should be encouraged.

For some years the Department, with the Crown Estate Office, has funded an ongoing programme of research to assess the availability of offshore sand and gravel resources around the coast of England and Wales. This will continue for some time to come.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a circular to authorities administering building regulations supporting the use of sea-based aggregate.

Mr. Yeo: There is nothing in the building regulations to discourage the use of sea dredged aggregates provided the guidance in the British Standard BS 882: 1983 (Specification for aggregates from natural sources for concrete) is followed.

Technical guidance about the acceptability of sea dredged aggregates in concrete was issued by the Building Research Establishment in July 1987. My Department has no plans to issue further specific guidance on this to authorities responsible for the administration of building regulations.

Mineral Sites

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to encourage local authorities to include in their calculations in relation to landbanks mineral sites not currently being worked when planning permission for working exists.

Mr. Yeo: The advice given in minerals planning guidance note 6 is that a sufficient stock of permitted reserves—a landbank—should be maintained for all aggregate minerals. This landbank should be sufficient to provide for at least 10 years extraction unless exceptional circumstances prevail. All mineral sites with planning

permission, regardless of whether they are in current production, should be taken into account in calculating this landbank.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals have been lodged to date against the uniform business rate in the Doncaster area.

Mr. Key: The Doncaster valuation officer had received by 31 December 1990, 4,490 proposals to alter the 1990 rating list.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional rate support grant Lambeth borough council received in 1985-86 by way of disregards in addition to those agreed before 1 April 1985; and how much of any additional grant related to the refusal by the council to set a rate in the first three months of the 1985-86 financial year.

Mr. Key: The categories of expenditure which were disregarded for the purpose of calculating grant abatement for 1985-86 are set out in annex VII to the "Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 4) 1985-86" (HC11) laid before the House on 19 December 1988. All these categories were determined after 1 April 1985. None is related to a delay in setting a rate. The aggregate of the amounts of disregards for Lambeth was £395,000. The effects on rate support grant cannot now be estimated without disproportionate costs.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 14 January, *Official Report*, column *446*, if he will give the reasons for the level of revenue support grant and other items of external finance for the London borough of Wandsworth per adult as against the inner London average.

Mr. Key: Under the settlement for 1991-92 announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 17 January, Wandsworth will receive £1,192 per adult in external support compared with an inner London average of £1,397. This is made up of £711 per head in revenue support grant compared with the average for inner London boroughs of £940 reflecting through the standard spending assessments Wandsworth's social, demographic and geographical characteristics; payments from the non-domestic rate pool at the national rate of £349 per adult; inner London education grant at £40 per adult—the average for inner London—to support education expenditure on responsibilities inherited from ILEA; and £91 per adult in area protection grant—to protect charge payers from undue burdens arising from the change in the system of local government finance—which is £23 above the inner London average.

Rents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department defines an affordable rent for *(a)* local authority tenants, *(b)* private housing tenants and *(c)* housing association tenants.

Mr. Yeo: Housing benefit is available, generally up to the level of market rents, for those tenants who would otherwise have difficulty affording their rents. In addition, subsidies to local authorities and housing associations enable rents to be kept far below market rent levels in most areas.

Quarries

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to promote the development of major quarries similar to Glensanda in Scotland where mineral can be bulk-hauled either by sea or rail.

Mr. Yeo: My Department is commissioning research which will shortly start to identify suitable locations for large scale coastal quarries and the potential contribution such quarries can make towards the demand for aggregates in the south-east of England in particular.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Heseltine: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in my Department. Estimates are however made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold (currently £250). However, following an inter-departmental exercise in 1972 an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs such as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Heseltine: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Sir Clifford Chetwood

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the speech of Sir Clifford Chetwood, President of the Building Employers Confederation, on 4 December 1990.

Mr. Yeo: My Department has a copy.

Air Pollution

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has received any representations regarding (i) the adequacy of the proposed cost recovery provisions for authorisations for air pollution control and (ii) the adequacy of the preparations for implementation of part I of the Environmental Protection Act;

(2) what support and guidance will be given to local authorities and their officers for implementing the new controls over air pollution;

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that local authority officers are fully conversant with the new system of air pollution controls prior to implementation;

(4) pursuant to his answer of 28 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *404*, if it remains his target to issue the process specific guidance for block 1 of the local air processes under part I of the Environmental Protection Act in January 1991 and the general guidance in March 1991;

(5) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of progress on preparations for operating the new local authority controls for air pollution;

(6) on what basis the level of fees for authorisations for local authority air processes and waste oil processes were determined.

Mr. Trippier: A liaison committee between Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) and the local authority associations was established in November 1989 to facilitate the smooth implementation and running of the new air pollution control system. It continues to meet frequently and has overseen the production of guidance notes both on the new system generally and on the processes to come under local authority control.

All the block 1 notes are now with the printers and should be published by early February. The general guidance notes remain on target for publication in March 1991. Once copy of each of the notes will be sent free of charge to each local authority and port health authority. Copies will also be on sale from HMSO.

The Department of the Environment and the Institution of Environmental Health Officers (IEHO) have jointly held a number of training courses around the country for local authorities and next month will be holding a two-day accreditation course for future trainers. The local authority unit of HMIP in Birmingham is also available for ad hoc advice. I am satisfied with what I hear from the unit and the local authority association liaison committee that adequate provision has been made to enable local authorities to prepare for the new system.

The level of fees was proposed after discussion with the local authority associations and industry on the basis of an assessment of the workload that would be incurred by local authorities in determining and enforcing authorisations. We are still considering the representations received and will in any case review the levels at the end of the first year of operation. Comments on the charging proposals were evenly split, with some local authorities claiming them to be inadequate (particularly in relation to enforcement costs) and some industrialists arguing that they were too high (particularly for waste oil burners). However, the National Society for Clean Air, the IEHO and the Association of District Councils supported them.

Both industry and local authorities have commented on the preparations for implementation of the part I systems of air pollution and integrated pollution control; to ensure a timely and orderly implementation of the latter we proposed on 9 August 1990 a revised timetable in relation to existing processes.

Hylands Park, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current status of negotiations on the planning application relating to Hylands park, Chelmsford.

Mr. Yeo: Negotiations on the revised proposals have not been completed.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of waste incinerated within the United Kingdom is imported; and what are the projected levels of such importation for the next decade.

Mr. Baldry: The Department's statistics on imports of waste relate only to hazardous waste imported under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988. Imported hazardous waste accounted for about 5 per cent. of hazardous waste incinerated in England in 1989-90. The provision of similar information for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively. No estimate has been made of the levels of imports of hazardous waste for incineration for the next decade.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the expansion rate of waste incineration projects and of the likely levels of air pollution resulting from such projects over the next 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: The Department is aware of 11 current proposals for new waste incinerators in England, including those for burning sewage sludge. However, these are at various stages of preparation, and there is no certainty that they will all go ahead. All new waste incinerators will be required to meet the very stringent emission standards of EC directive 89/369. Incinerators over one tonne per hour capacity will in addition require to be authorised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the new integrated pollution control provisions in the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on proposals to build new incinerators for the purposes of burning toxic waste and as to how many of these devices are planned and where they are to be located.

Mr. Baldry: The Deparment is aware of proposals for five new incinerators for burning toxic waste in England, although these are all subject to planning permission. Their locations are:

Trafford Park (Greater Manchester)
Doncaster
Seal Sands (Cleveland)
Portrack (Cleveland)
Howden (Newcastle)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what actions have been taken to investigate links between pollution emissions and medical conditions in humans and livestock arising out of the activities of the company ReChem;

(2) what research projects have been carried out *(a)* independently and *(b)* by his Department into the effects

on human health of substances emitted from waste disposal incinerators; and what was the cost of his Department's investigations.

Mr. Baldry: In 1984 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland appointed an expert group to carry out an independent review of morbidity in the Bonnybridge/Denny area, in which a ReChem incinerator plant was located, under the chairmanship of Professor J. Lenihan. The review group's report was published by the Scottish Home and Health Departments in February 1985.

The Government are currently funding the independent small area health statistics unit at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to investigate possible links between pollution from industrial installations and ill-health in the local community. Specific types of installations being studied include municipal waste incinerators and waste oil and solvent incinerators. The results of the studies will be published in due course.

The cost of individual studies is not separately identified but the total cost of the small area health statistics unit is currently £448,000 per year, of which the Department contributes one third.

A number of other studies have been made into levels of pollutants found in the vicinity of waste disposal incinerators, but they have not attempted to link any pollution with health. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has recently appointed an independent adviser to specify such a study in the area surrounding the ReChem incinerator at Pontypool.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions he plans to introduce in order to reduce the amount of imported toxic waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has taken the lead in the European Community and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in calling for all developed countries to become self-sufficient in disposing of their own waste. The United Kingdom is actively involved in negotiations for several international agreements which should help to reduce the amount of imported hazardous waste.

The proposed amendment to the EC framework directive on waste (75/442/EEC) agreed by the Environment Council in June 1990 refers to the objective of self-sufficiency in waste disposal both for the Community as a whole and for member states individually.

The proposed Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community would introduce new controls on imports of hazardous waste. The draft OECD decision-recommendation on the reduction of transfrontier movements of waste includes provision for member countries to reduce transfrontier movements to the lowest possible level. Apart from these prospective international agreements the Environmental Protection Act 1990 gives the Secretary of State additional powers, should they be needed, to control imports of waste.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the United Kingdom's position in the league table of European countries which import toxic waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: There are at present no reliable comparable figures for imports of hazardous waste by European countries. However, figures are likely to be available in the future as a result of two prospective international agreements. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's draft decision-recommendation on the reduction of transfrontier movements of waste includes provision for member countries to co-operate in collecting and publishing data on waste imports and exports. The proposed European Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community also includes provision for the collection and publication of information on imports and exports of waste. Imports of hazardous waste into the United Kingdom are not large: in 1989-90 they amounted to about 35,000 tonnes, less than 2 per cent. of the hazardous waste we produce ourselves. The Government are pleased that the trend is downward. Imports in 1989-90 were less than half those two years earlier.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what quantity of waste, in the last year in which figures are available, was imported for direct landfill within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: The last year for which figures are available is 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990 when 140 tonnes of hazardous waste were imported into England for direct landfill.

The provision of similar information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Wales, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what quantities per nation annually European toxic waste has been imported by the United Kingdom for each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the importation of waste by country of origin into the United Kingdom is available only since the introduction of the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations in October 1988.

The information in respect of imports of waste from European Community states through English ports for the financial years (1 April to 31 March) 1988-89 and 1989-90 is shown in the following table.

The provision of similar information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Wales, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Country of origin	*Waste imported (tonnes)*	
	1988-89	*1989-90*
Belgium	3,961	5,757
Denmark	185	49
Federal Republic of Germany	0	885
France	0	16
Greece	0	5
Republic of Ireland	261	1,704
Italy	273	1,851
Luxembourg	0	17
Netherlands	5,224	10,663
Portugal	0	73
Spain	0	241

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific action he is taking to identify the nature of all waste in transit.

Mr. Baldry: The Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 control imports and exports. Under these regulations hazardous waste in transit must be accompanied by documents identifying the waste. The proposed European Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community is expected to replace the 1988 regulations. The proposal covers all waste, except non-hazardous waste for recycling. The proposal includes provision for all waste in transit to be accompanied by identifying documents. Movements of special waste within England, Scotland and Wales are controlled under the Special Waste Regulations 1980. These regulations require that appropriate documents identify waste in transit. Under the new duty of care in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 adequate written descriptions will have to be transferred with all consignments of controlled waste (except for household waste produced in a domestic property).

Dioxin

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to remove dioxin from the United Kingdom environment.

Mr. Baldry: The risks posed by the trace quantities of dioxins in the environment do not warrant any specific action to remove them. Dioxins in the environment tend to be absorbed onto soil particles and are gradually changed into other substances by the action of natural chemical, physical and biological processes. The Government's policy is to take action to reduce the levels of dioxins entering the environment from industrial and other sources. This will in due course result in lower levels of dioxins occurring in the environment.

Local Government

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the Boundary Commission to increase the number of parish, community or town councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Two Local Government Boundary Commission reports before my right hon. Friend for his decision recommend the creation of new parishes. The reports concern the borough of Pendle in Lancashire, and the district of Derbyshire Dales.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered amending the concurrent functions that operate between parish and district councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No: there is no evidence that the concurrent powers of district and parish councils create problems. While there are non-parish areas within district councils, districts must continue to have some powers in these fields.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received to increase the number of parish and town councils in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: There have been no recent representations on this subject. Since Ministers have power to create new parishes only on the recommendation of the Local Government Boundary Commission, the question is in the first place for them, and for the district councils on whom the primary responsibility for reviewing the structure of parishes lies.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new parish, community or town councils have been created since 1974; and if he will give details of their location.

Mr. Key: The Department publishes an annual bulletin of changes in local government structure, including the creation of new parishes on the recommendation of the Local Government Boundary Commission and the creation of new parish councils by district councils. Copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations to introduce parish councils in the larger cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: There have been no recent representations on this subject. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England considered proposals to create new parishes throughout the city of Birmingham, but did not recommend that change.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to give statutory powers to parish councils to have access to information of any proposals for change of services or facilities involving parish councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No: though the role of parish councils is relevant to the current review of local government.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if parish councils are to receive any part of the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The proceeds from the uniform business rate go into the collection fund operated by the charging authority in each area. Each local authority makes a demand on the collection fund for its income. Parish councils therefore have the same access to business rate income as do county and district councils.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice is given to parish councils on obtaining grants to carry out environmental improvements in their area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No general advice is issued, but the Department is happy to give what advice it can in specific cases when asked.

Sefton Park Palm House

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why proposals submitted to his Merseyside task force for improvements to Liverpool's Sefton Park palm house, to be financed under the urban fund, have not been proceeded with; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Proposals to restore the palm house were submitted in Liverpool's 1989-90 programme and again in

the 1990-91 programme. Ministers at that time were not satisfied that cost estimates for this specialised renovation task were sufficiently robust and detailed costings were commissioned. Liverpool submitted a detailed appraisal in June 1990 and this was used as a basis for further consultation. I am not satisfied that in their present form the proposals offer value for money. If the city were to come forward with wider proposals for the park linked to adjoining initiatives by the Merseyside development corporation, I would be prepared to reconsider the issue.

House Improvement Grant

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the implementation of the new house improvement grant system by Liverpool city council.

Mr. Yeo: The implementation of the house renovation grant system is a local authority responsibility and Liverpool city council has a duty to comply with the statutory requirements.

Property Surveying

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require all building surveyors to show proof of adequate liability prior to any property surveying work being undertaken for members of the public.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. member to the answer given to him on 4 December 1989 by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State at column 9.

Garden Festival Site, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the original land reclamation costs, and the subsequent annual costs of maintenance and repair, of the international garden festival site, Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The garden festival site was reclaimed as part of a wider land reclamation scheme in the Liverpool south docks area, the total cost of which was £10·6 million. The current annual maintenance cost of the festival park is £200,000.

Local Authority Finance Settlement

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make the local authority finance settlement for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine: I have today laid before the House the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1991-92, the Population Report (England) (No.2), the Special Grant Report (No. 2) and the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England).

Postal Service, Lancashire

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that postal service names and areas and local government names and areas in Lancashire are brought into alignment.

Mr. Key: It is for the Post Office to decide on what names and areas to use for the postal service.

Water Supplies

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the National Rivers Authority about the need for local planning authorities to consult the National Rivers Authority about the availability of water supplies before planning permissions are approved.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 20 December 1990]:* My right hon. Friend is not aware of any such representations. He listens closely to any comments or proposals which the National Rivers Authority may make to him.

Housing Subsidy (Lambeth)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the reason for the continuation of the previous basis for housing subsidy when Lambeth borough council changed its accounting policy on sinking fund accumulation rates used for debt charges in the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Yeo: The Department refused Lambeth borough council's request to increase from 5 per cent. to 10 per cent. the sinking fund accumulated rate used in the calculation of housing subsidy entitlement because such a change would have resulted in an increase in the amount of subsidy paid to the council in the long term.

Antarctica

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received from hon. Members and their constituents on the matter of the environment in Antarctica.

Mr. Baldry: Most inquiries of hon. Members on this subject are addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is responsible for policy on the Antarctic. A small number of letters recently addressed to Ministers in this Department have been passed to my right hon. Friend for his attention.

Sea Bathing

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department expects to receive the report of the 1990 research into the health risks of sea bathing; and when this report will be made available to the House.

Mr. Baldry: We expect to receive the final report of the 1990 studies in early April and copies will be placed in the Library shortly thereafter.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 22 January 1991

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the FCO. Details of the average cost involved throughout all Departments was given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury in her answer to the hon. Member on 18 December at column *112*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Entry Visas

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the past 12 months how many entry visa applications have *(a)* been received and *(b)* granted in respect of (i) Poland, (ii) Yugoslavia, (iii) Czechoslovakia, (iv) Romania, (v) Albania, (vi) Hungary, (vii) Bulgaria and (viii) the Soviet Union.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The figures for entry clearance applications of all types processed in 1990 in the countries concerned are:

	Received	*Granted*
Poland	44,912	42,694
Yugoslavia	1,354	1,133
Czechoslovakia	23,258	23,184
Romania	9,911	9,226
Hungary	19,452	19,391
Bulgaria	7,712	7,625
USSR	45,752	45,585

There is no entry clearance post in Albania.

Mr. Roman Mronov

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Russian Government about their failure to grant an exit visa to Roman Mronov of Kharkov to allow him to join his wife, son and in-laws in Israel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise this case with the Soviet authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective we shall need further details.

THE ARTS

Libraries

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Arts when the inter-library loan scheme, operated by the British Library at Boston Spa, changed its procedures in respect of books loaned to other libraries in respect of charges made for *(a)* late return and *(b)* non-return of items; what other changes have been implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: In October 1990 the British Library introduced changes to its system for reminding customers about long overdue loans and charges for lost items. This followed a review in the light of increasing numbers of such items which were causing inconvenience to other customers, and discussions with representatives of other libraries.

The principal effect of the changes is to introduce a non-refundable administrative charge on long-overdue items following the issue of three reminders. The separate charge towards the cost of replacement of non-returned items will continue to be credited if they are subsequently returned within six months. Another change is to allow renewals on demand of items on loan if not required by another customer.

Antiquities

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will provide additional resources to the national museums to fund research on antiquities using the work of Professor Alec Jeffreys, FRS, of Leicester university in relation to stable DNA.

Mr. Renton: I understand that Professor Alec Jeffrey's work on developing DNA probes involving genetic fingerprinting has been undertaken not only in university departments but in museums, often utilising material from national museums.

The natural history museum has been developing DNA studies over the past five years and has recently constructed a special laboratory for this type of work. This work is supported through the museum's grant-in-aid and also by funding from research councils and private funding agencies. The museum's bid for funding from my Department in 1991-92 has been met in full.

TRANSPORT

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do

so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. The measures are kept under review.

Lindane

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the container of Lindane lost in the channel in 1989 has been located; and if it remains unbreached.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 6 March 1990, at columns *559-60*; the container of Lindane has not been located by the French authorities in whose area of responsibility it was lost and in consequence it is not known whether it has been breached.

The French authorities have not detected any increase in background levels of the substance in the course of their programme of sampling and analysis of seawater and fish. Sampling by our own fisheries department confirms this.

Nuclear and Toxic Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the last 12 months for which he has figures the tonnage of *(a)* nuclear waste and *(b)* toxic waste that has been (i) shipped and (ii) discharged from vessels within the limit of the Port of London Authority.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am informed by HM inspectorate of pollution that no nuclear waste has been shipped or discharged from vessels within the limits of the Port of London Authority during the last 12 months. Imports of toxic waste discharged from vessels within the Port of London Authority amounted to 1,189 tonnes between April 1989 and March 1990. No toxic waste was shipped for export. No information is collected centrally on domestic movements of toxic waste shipped or discharged at sea ports.

Child Pedestrians

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the child pedestrian casualties in Britain in 1989 occurred in a street where they lived; and in how many of these cases were the motor vehicles involved travelling at above the speed limit at the moment of impact.

Mr. Chope: The standard report form, STATS19, sent by police to the Department of Transport for all road accidents, does not have information on the addresses of casualties or an estimate of the speed of vehicles involved in accidents.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for a change in the law so that when a child pedestrian is knocked down in a residential street the burden of proof is on the driver that due care was taken rather than on the child.

Mr. Chope: We have no proposals for such a change in road traffic law which would be contrary to the general principle of the criminal justice system that the burden of proof rests with the prosecution. We are however taking other steps, including encouraging the introduction of 20 mph zones and traffic calming measures and launching a major publicity campaign, which will improve child road safety in residential areas.

A13

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements to the A13 between the North Circular road and Butcher row are currently being undertaken; at what cost; and when they will be completed.

Mr. Chope: Departmental schemes currently under construction are:

Scheme	*Works cost £ million*	*Estimated date of completion*
Leamouth Road Junction Interim Scheme	2·0	Mid 1991
West India Dock Road Junction Advance statutory undertaker's works	3·1	Late 1991

The following schemes are due to start this year:

Scheme	*Works cost £ million*	*Estimated date of completion*
West India Dock Road Junction phase 1	1·2	Spring 1992
Canning Town Flyover/Ironbridge widening Advanced Works phase 1 Bridge over A102	0·5	Late 1991

Other schemes in preparation are:

	Works cost £ million	*Estimated date of completion*
Cotton Street/Blackwall Tunnel	3·5	1994
West India Dock Road Junction phase 2	0·6	1993
Butcher Row Junction	0·7	1993
Canning Town Flyover/Ironbridge widening Advance works phase 2	9·2	1993
Canning Town Flyover/Ironbridge widening	21·0	1997
A13/A112 Junction Improvement	44·4	1996
A13/A117 Junction Improvment	35·6	1995

Progress on some of these schemes will be dependent on the completion of statutory processes which could be subject to public inquiry. Completion dates are therefore provisional.

Chief Inspector Transport Security

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the duties and activities of the chief inspector of transport security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The chief inspector of transport security was appointed on 1 November 1990. His duties are to develop the necessary programme on the maritime side and oversee the implementation of aviation and maritime security measures. He also provides a source of advice on security matters in other forms of transport. In particular, he contributes advice on the security of channel tunnel operations.

Dangerous Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines are issued to British Rail regarding co-operation with other agencies in planning

emergency liaison procedures in case of accident during the transportation of *(a)* radioactive waste, *(b)* nuclear warloads and *(c)* toxic waste.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for the safety of staff and the public rests primarily with the railway operator and advice is given on request. British Rail liaises at all levels with the emergency services. Emergency procedures are regularly rehearsed both as theoretical and practical exercises to ensure that the emergency services are in a position to deal effectively with any incident that may occur.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the latest developments in making RAF Finningley a joint military/civil airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: The operation of joint military/civil airfields is not possible under United Kingdom aviation regulations. Civil aircraft may use military airfields subject to such flights being compatible with operational considerations. I understand that civil aircraft are already allowed to use RAF Finningley by prior permission, but the scope to accept additional civilian traffic is severely limited by the needs of military flying. Use of RAF airfields is a matter for the Secretary of State for Defence.

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. McLoughlin: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the Department of Transport. Estimates are however made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold—currently £250. However, following an interdepartmental exercise in 1972 an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs such as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. McLoughlin: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Britannia Airways Boeing 757 which lost a wheel after taking off from Gatwick airport on 15 January was given a complete overhaul and service check; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The air accidents investigation branch is carrying out a field investigation into the incident and will publish a report in due course. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a copy of the report.

Coaches, Central London

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many coaches are estimated to visit central London on an average day during the summer; how many coach parking spaces are available *(a)* on-street and *(b)* off-street; and if he will make a statement on proposals to increase the available number of such spaces.

Mr. Chope: Latest figures indicate that there are some 1,000 coach movements in central London each weekday. Parking provision is primarily the responsibility of local authorities. There are approximately 80 on-street and 450 off-street spaces, mostly used by tourist coaches. This excludes off-street provision solely for commuter coaches of which there is no record. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will shortly host a further meeting with interested parties to consider initiatives for improving the provision and use of parking spaces for coaches.

Airports

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made to examine the options put forward by the Civil Aviation Authority on new runway capacity in south-east England; if he will list the membership of relevant working groups; when he expects to announce a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) on 26 November 1990, *Official Report* columns 272-73, when he announced the terms of reference and subgroup structure, and those he had invited to become members, of the working group which he had announced earlier was to be established to build on the Civil Aviation Authority's advice on runway capacity.

Responses to those invitations have now been received. On the main group, in addition to the relevant Government Departments and the CAA, are the London and South East Regional Planning Conference—SERPLAN—the Federation of Heathrow Anti-Noise Groups—FHANG—the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign—GACC—the North West Essex and East Hertfordshire Preservation Association—NWEEHPA—the Airfield Environment Federation—AEF—the International Air Transport Association, the International Air Carrier Association, the British Air Transport Association—BATA—the Airport Operators Association—AOA—the Joint Airports Committee of Local Authorities, BAA plc, the Association of British Travel Agents, the British Tourist Authority, and the Air Transport Users Committee.

The members of the subgroup which will examine environmental and developmental issues are SERPLAN, FHANG, GACC, NWEEHPA, AEF, the Kent training and enterprise council and the chairmen of the airport consultative committees for Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, Bournemouth, Bristol Lulsgate, Southampton and Lydd airports. On the surface access subgroup are British Rail, London Regional Transport, SERPLAN and BAA plc. On the noise subgroup are the CAA, FHANG,

GACC, NWEEHPA, AEF, AOA, BAA plc and BATA. On the airport development subgroup are the CAA, BATA and the airport operators at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, Bournemouth, Bristol Lulsgate, Bristol Filton, Southampton, Lydd and Manston airports. The subgroups will also include the relevant Government Departments.

To ensure the working group has access to a wide range of views, its considerations are to be supplemented by a written consultation. A consultation document was issued on 20 December.

Until the group has completed its work and has presented its advice to my right hon. and learned Friend, it is not possible to indicate the timing of further steps. The group is to meet for the first time on 1 February.

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to enable British airlines and others directly affected by the economic impact of the Gulf crisis to weather the financial problems facing them at the present time.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to offer financial assistance. He has, however, taken steps to provide certain reinsurance facilities under the terms of the Marine and Aviation Insurance (War Risks) Act 1952, to help ensure that British airlines maintain services that otherwise would not have been operated. These services provide an opportunity for members of the British community in the Gulf region to leave if that is their wish.

Speed Restrictions

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to apprise local authorities of the Department's new proposals for 20 mph speed zones in association with the installation of road humps; and if he will take steps to ensure that local authorities are encouraged to make use of these new regulations.

Mr. Chope: We have issued a new roads circular—4/90—on the guidelines to be followed by local authorities when considering new schemes. We are encouraging local authorities to establish 20 mph zones, and have allocated over £31 million for local safety schemes within the minor works allocation of the transport supplementary grant settlement.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the road transport sector.

Mr. Chope: The Government's strategy for reducing carbon dioxide emissions from road transport is outlined in chapter 5 of "This Common Inheritance"—Cm. 1200.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the trunk road improvement schemes in England for which contracts were awarded in 1990.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* Contracts for the following schemes, valued at over £1 million were awarded in 1990.

Scheme		*Successful tenderer*	*Contract price £ million*
A42	Castle Donington North, Contract 2	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	16·8
A6	Quorn and Mountsorrel bypass	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	31·8
A16	Louth bypass	Clugston Construction Ltd.	4·9
A47	Castor and Ailsworth bypass	Roadworks (1952) Ltd.	7·7
A604	(M1/A1 Link) Contract 5S	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	30·7
A523	Macclesfield relief road	Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd.	18·7
A140	Dickleburgh bypass	J. Breheny (Contractors) Ltd.	2·2
A23	Brighton bypass, Sayers Common to Muddleswood	Amey Construction Ltd.	10·5
A650	Drighlington bypass	A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	4·9
A1079	Market Weighton bypass	Birse Construction Ltd.	3·3
M62	Closed circuit TV installation, junctions 26, 27 and 29	Serco Ltd.	1·2
A43	Blisworth bypass	Galliford (UK) Ltd.	15·1
A47	East Norton bypass	Midland Oak Contractors Ltd.	1·2
A30	Plusha to Bolventor improvement	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	10·7
A595	Hensingham bypass	Eden Construction Ltd.	4·3
A27	Brighton bypass, Hangleton to Dyke Road	M. J. Gleeson Group Ltd.	8·8
A38	Marsh Mills junction improvement	Hochtief Ag.	22·5
A1	Bramham to Wetherby improvement	Monk Construction Ltd.	14·9
A10	Brandon Creek to Southery improvement	J. Breheny (Contractors) Ltd.	1·0
A47	Norwich Southern bypass, Contract 4	A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	29·9
M40	Widening junctions 4 to 5	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	35·9
A42	Castle Donington North, Contract 3	Redland Aggregates Ltd.	2·8
A282	Dartford—Thurrock Crossing, Northern approach improvement	Cementation (Major Projects) Ltd.	8·3
A30	Penhale to Carland Cross improvement	Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd.	9·1
M4	Junction 12 improvements, (Section 278 agreement)	Associated Asphalt Co. Ltd.	1·3
A35	Axminster bypass	Farr Plc	8·1
A41	Whitchurch bypass	Birse Construction Ltd.	8·9
M40	Longbridge maintenance compound, provision of new roundabout	Midland Oak (Contractors) Ltd.	1·1
A11	Red Lodge bypass	J. Breheny (Contractors) Ltd.	4·8
A303	Mere to Wincanton improvement	Wimpey Construction Ltd.	15·3
A30	Zelah bypass	Dean & Dyball Ltd.	2·6
A23	Purley Cross junction improvement, (Section 278 agreement)	Costain Civil Engineering Ltd.	1·5
M42/M40	Umberslade junction improvement	Monk Construction Ltd.	1·5
M5/M6	Closed circuit TV installation, Contract 5	C. M. R. Electronics Ltd.	2·4

Scheme		*Successful tenderer*	*Contract price £ million*
A27	Brighton bypass, Patcham to Coldean	Amey Construction Ltd.	14·8
A3	Liphook and Petersfield bypasses	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	35·8
A23	Brighton bypass, Muddleswood to Patcham	Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	14·3
A20	Folkestone to Court Wood, Contract 1	Balfour Beatty Ltd	27·3
A47	Norwich Southern bypass, Contract 3	May Gurney & Co. Ltd.	14·8
A49	Weaverham Diversion	Birse Construction Ltd.	4·2
A65	Draughton bypass	Shand Construction Ltd.	2·1
A47	Norwich Southern bypass, Contract 2	A. F. Budge Contractors Ltd.	8·6
A423	Maidenhead Thicket to Burchetts Green improvement	Birse Construction Ltd.	8·4
A516	Etwall bypass	A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	2·7
A59	Mellor Brook bypass	Eden Construction Ltd.	1·9

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the trunk road improvement schemes in England for which his Department plans to award contracts during 1991.

Mr. Chope: *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:]* I shall make an announcement soon.

Coach Drivers

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to take steps to increase the observance of the 70 mph speed limit by coach drivers on motorways.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Enforcement of the law on speed limits is a matter for the police. Coaches first used on or after April 1984 are already required to be fitted with speed limiters to prevent them from being driven at more than 70 mph. From 1 April this year, coaches first used between 1974 and 1984 will also need to have speed limiters. From the same date we shall be including a speed limiter check in the annual roadworthiness tests of coaches.

Motor Vehicle Emissions

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received about the possibility of setting MOT motor vehicle emission standards based on individual manufacturers specifications; whether he will discuss with the European Commission whether variable standards would conflict with EC legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Setting emissions standards based on vehicle manufacturers' specifications would result in a more demanding in-use standard than the one which has previously been allowed by the relevant EC type approval directive. We therefore propose to set carbon monoxide testing standards on the basis outlined in our consultation letter of 20 September 1990. I hope to be able to sign enabling regulations shortly.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Sector Manpower

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North dated 19 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *177*, on public sector manning, if he will list those parts of central and local government which have *(a)* increased and *(b)* decreased manpower since 1979, giving numbers in each case.

Mr. Mellor: I have placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

Excise Duties

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the price of the most widely selling category of cigarettes is accounted for by excise duties, including value added tax; what are the comparable percentages on petrol, spirits, beers and wines; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The percentage of price accounted for by excise duties and value added tax for the goods specified in the question is as follows:

	Total tax as percentage of price
Cigarettes – 20 king size	72·8
Petrol – 4 star – per litre	59·4
Petrol – unleaded – per litre	55·3
Spirits – 75cl bottle	68·9
Beer – pint	31·3
Wine – still table – 1 litre bottle	52·9

Third World Debt

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any proposals to alter the tax treatment by the Inland Revenue of United Kingdom banks which make provision against Third world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget Statement.

Tobacco Excise Duty

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would have been the effect on the retail prices index had tobacco excise duty, inclusive of the value added tax, been index linked for 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that the impact on the retail prices index of an indexation of tobacco excise duty in 1990-91 would have been to increase the index by 0·15 per cent.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the gross domestic products of the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany was attributable to manufacturing industry in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Figures of gross domestic product analysed by industry, including manufacturing industry, are shown in the annual OECD publication on national accounts. The most recent edition, entitled "National Accounts, Detailed Tables, Volume II (1976-1988)", gives these figures in table 12 for each country.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Exchequer income during the financial year 1991-92 resulting from *(a)* maintaining the married couple's allowance for those aged 65 to 74 years at its current cash value of £2,145 and *(b)* maintaining the married couple's allowance for those aged 75 years and over at its current cash value of £2,185.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the revenue yields in a full year would be *(a)* £40 million and *(b)* £10 million, compared with statutory indexation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beer

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the price of hops and barley and of beer in the last 10 years for which records are available.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is given in the table.

Hops—Growers' Prices (average farmgate)

	£/Tonne
1981	2,636
1982	2,754
1983	3,140
1984	3,307
1985	2,297
1986	2,233
1987	2,299
1988	2,417
1989	2,395
1990	[1]2,400

[1] (Provisional).
Source: MAFF.

Malting barley—Ex farm purchases made in England and Wales. Calendar year simple averages calculated as specified in the Corn Returns Act 1882 (as amended). Prices are gross of the co-responsibility levy where applicable.

	£/Tonne
1981	106·5
1982	110·5
1983	131·1
1984	126·7
1985	116·7
1986	121·7
1987	126·1
1988	120·0
1989	125·9
1990	122·6

Source: MAFF.

Beer—Retail prices across all outlets

	pence/pint
1980	45·5
1981	53·5
1982	59·5
1983	64·9
1984	70·4
1985	76·9
1986	81·5
1987	85·2
1988	90·4
1989	96·3

These figures are based on current prices from consumers' expenditure and volume of production figures from the Brewers' Society and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.
Source: CSO.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of confirmed cases of BSE by county in England and Wales in the months to *(a)* 17 December 1990 and *(b)* 17 January 1991.

Mr. Maclean: The information for England and Wales is as follows:

County	*Month ending 17 December 1990*	*Month ending 17 January 1991*
Avon	40	17
Bedfordshire	5	1
Berkshire	12	4
Buckinghamshire	25	4
Cambridgeshire	4	6
Cheshire	48	37
Cleveland	2	0
Clwyd	12	24
Cornwall	90	90
Cumbria	40	24
Derbyshire	14	5
Devon	41	129
Dorset	84	81
Durham	4	1
Dyfed	60	43
Essex	4	2
Glamorgan, Mid.	6	1
Glamorgan, South	2	2
Glamorgan, West	2	1
Gloucestershire	45	18
Gwent	7	1
Gwynedd	2	4
Hampshire	29	26
Hereford and Worcester	23	10
Hertfordshire	5	0
Humberside	7	1
Isle of Wight	4	10
Kent	14	15
Lancashire	22	29
Leicestershire	20	7
Lincolnshire	11	8
London	1	0
Manchester	2	1
Merseyside	3	0
Norfolk	27	16
Northants	9	8
Northumberland	6	4
Nottinghamshire	7	2
Oxon	19	11
Powys	12	19
Salop	33	23
Somerset	118	80
Staffordshire	31	18
Suffolk	8	6
Surrey	12	2
Sussex, East	12	15

County	Month ending 17 December 1990	Month ending 17 January 1991
Sussex, West	37	17
West Midlands	1	1
Warwickshire	10	2
Wiltshire	67	57
Yorkshire, North	55	51
Yorkshire, South	6	1
Yorkshire, West	8	3
Total	1,168	938

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what expenditure has been incurred by his Department in ensuring slaughterhouses in England meet EC standards.

Mr. Maclean: The Department does not provide any special financial assistance for compliance with EC standards in slaughterhouses. Advice on these standards is available from the Ministry's veterinary staff.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Ministry's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by civil servants outside his Ministry's offices.

Mr. Curry: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

Chernobyl

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the restricted areas in England and Wales where there are still controls in force on the movement of livestock, due to the fall-out effects of the Chernobyl disaster; and how long these will remain.

Mr. Maclean: Some reductions in the size of the post-Chernobyl restricted areas in England and Wales were made on Monday 14 January 1991. Details of the areas still under restriction, in parts of Cumbria, Clwyd, Gwynedd and Powys, can be found in the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) Order 1991 and the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Wales) Order 1991. The situation will be reviewed again at the end of the 1991 marketing season with a view to releasing further areas from controls as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising the continuing safety of the food chain.

Farm Subsidies

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to speed up the payment of grants and subsidies to farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The timing of payments depends on a number of factors, including the determination of the relevant rates, rules of eligibility and the availability of resources to carry out detailed administrative checks. Subject to these constraints, payments are made as quickly as possible. I fully recognise the importance of early payments to the farmers concerned.

PRIME MINISTER

War Graves

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to co-ordinate the activities of the different departments and agencies involved in the maintenance of war graves to ensure that a memorial will continue to exist to honour the memory of men killed in HMS Amethyst on the Yangtse River, China, in July 1949.

The Prime Minister: The memorial will remain in St. Nicholas' church and it will be looked after and maintained for anyone wishing to view it or pay tribute.

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken in formulating coalition military policy in the Gulf to avoid damage to cultural and religious sites; and what protection is being afforded to Ur of the Chaldees and to Babylon.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the remarks made on this matter during the debate on the Gulf situation yesterday.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister what steps are taken to co-ordinate action by relevant Government Departments regarding the problem of unemployment amongst the disabled.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has the lead responsibility within government for policies to assist unemployed people with disabilities back to work. There are frequent discussions between the Department of Employment and other relevant departments at ministerial and official level to ensure that policies are properly co-ordinated.

ENERGY

Petroleum Coke

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list year by year since 1980 the sources of petroleum coke burned in the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will list by year since 1980 his estimate of the tonnage of petroleum coke being burned in domestic appliances in the United Kingdom; and what is the level of sulphur content per tonne burnt.

Mr. Moynihan: All petroleum coke supplied to the metal refining industry is produced in the United Kingdom. All petroleum coke reaching the domestic market and used as an industrial fuel for refractory and cement manufacture is imported. Figures realting to the amount of imported petroleum coke used domestically and its sulphur content are not available.

Petrol Supplies

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from independent petrol retailers about allocation of supplies of petrol under contingency plans for rationing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I have received one such representation which is now receiving attention. Under the allocation schemes which the Department could activate in the event of fuel shortage there is no differentiation between retail outlets operated by the oil companies and those of independent operators. Both would be subject to the same restrictions on their supplies.

There are ample oil supplies at present. The International Energy Agency has, in addition, brought into effect a contingency plan which will make available an additional 2·5 million barrels of oil per day to the market. This should further reassure the market and the public that, if shortages do occur, additional supplies will be available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Leasing and Rental Agreements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on his Department's request to Sir Ron Dearing to investigate leasing and rental agreements.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has written to the Accounting Standards Board drawing attention to the problem that the accounts of some companies appear to have paid insufficient regard to potential future liabilities inherent in the business such as the impact of early termination of leases or continuing maintenance obligations. This may be a question of judgment in applying existing requirements or it may suggest a need to strengthen accounting standards. The Accounting Standards Board has confirmed that it will consider this problem.

Knitwear Industry

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies, units and departments of the knitwear industry have ceased trading during the last two years; what action he intends to take to arrest this decline; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: There are no Government statistics available that relate directly to such closures. However, a recent report in the trade journal, *Knitting News*, suggested that 143 companies, units and departments in the knitwear industry have been affected by closure, closedown of an operation, or change of ownership in the past two years. Decisions on such matters are for the commercial judgment of the firms concerned.

The Department encourages growth in all markets by promoting enterprise and by creating a climate in which all sectors of industry can flourish. There are no plans for any new initiatives specifically for the textile and clothing industries. The Department's general regional, export and consultancy services are, however, already available to these industries.

Textile Industry

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the level of representations at the recent international textile manufacturing exhibition in China by *(a)* German, *(b)* Italian and *(c)* United Kingdom machine manufacturers.

Mr. Sainsbury: Exact information is not available, but it is estimated that there were about 80 exhibitors from Italy; a further 50 or so from Germany; and at least 10 from the United Kingdom.

Political Donations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take proceedings under the Companies Act 1985 against Stock Land and Estates, formerly called J. A. and M. A. Carter Developments, for failure to disclose the recipients of political donations in the financial year ended September 1985.

Mr. Redwood: In accordance with its usual practice in response to specific allegations of non-compliance with statutory disclosure requirements, my Department will look into this and, if there has been a failure to comply with those requirements, it will take appropriate action.

Petroleum Coke

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research has been and is being carried out, and at what cost, to determine the dangers of petroleum coke used in domestic appliances.

Mr. Leigh: My predecessor has met suppliers of petroleum coke. In addition, my Department is looking into what evidence there is from those who have sought controls on the supply of petroleum coke for domestic use, as well as existing research work on the burning characteristics of this fuel.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department is taking to advise members of the public as to risks associated with the use of petroleum coke; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is discussing with suppliers of petroleum coke the instructions for use of the fuel for domestic purposes, the form of these instructions and how they can be best conveyed to consumers.

Sensitive Technologies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives have been taken by his Department to explain to companies wishing to export sensitive technologies, the current regulations and risks involved in such exports.

Mr. Lilley: My Department makes available to exporters a range of guidance booklets and information describing controls on the export of sensitive goods and technology and how they are implemented. We have in addition organised a major programme of seminars to increase awareness of the risks of clandestine attempts to procure such goods for use in nuclear, chemical or biological weapons programmes, or missile delivery

systems, and the steps that need to be taken to prevent this. My officials stand ready to provide advice to any exporter seeking guidance on matters relating to export controls.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with manufacturers of computer hardware to make equipment more accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: No discussions for this specific purpose have taken place since the end of the Concerned Technology campaign in 1989. Concerned Technology was part of the Department's programme to raise general awareness of information technology. The general awareness programme has now ended, and the Department's efforts are directed towards the broader needs of business and commerce through promotion of the use of information technology in accordance with best practice and through support for basic research to strengthen industry's technological capability. My Department's role in serving the interests of disabled people is through encouragement of the develolpment and use of basic technologies which will improve the capabilities and adaptability of all products that utilise them. It is now for those in the industry to respond to demands expressed by the disabled and caring agencies when designing their products.

The Employment Department is responsible for a range of special aids, including special computer equipment, to help the disabled to obtain and keep employment.

Photocopying Companies

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) about which photocopying companies he has received complaints of malpractice;

(2) what action he is taking to investigate the complaints he has received of malpractice by photocopying companies;

(3) when he expects to report on the conclusions of his Department's investigation into malpractice by photocopying companies.

Mr. Redwood: As I made clear in the Adjournment debate on 12 November 1990, at column 423, I am willing to consider any evidence that might warrant an inquiry under the Companies Act. I have now received information from the hon. Gentleman and from other sources. I continue to liaise with the Director General of Fair Trading to whom the complaints have been copied and who has a duty to consider the continued fitness of licensees to retain licences granted to them under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. But, as I explained on 12 November 1990, I will not be able to confirm whether we or any other authority are conducting an investigation.

Insurance Act 1982

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulatory inquiries have been carried out by his Department or its inspectors under the Insurance Act 1982 in each year; and, in each case, which section of the Act was involved.

Mr. Redwood: Taking regulatory inquiries to mean actuarial investigations—section 42 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982—or use of powers to obtain information—section 44—the information requested, drawn from the insurance annual reports is:

Year	*Section 42*	*Section 44*
1983	8	24
1984	11	29
1985	6	25
1986	4	21
1987	6	39
1988	1	24
1989	3	31

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give a detailed breakdown of the planned increases in central Government expenditure by ECGD in each year 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 as announced in the autumn statement as against the plans in the January 1990 public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* This information will be published next month in the new Trade and Industry departmental report.

Soviet Union

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review existing trade agreements with the Soviet Union in the light of recent events in Lithuania and Latvia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Trade agreements are matters of European Community competence. EC Foreign Ministers have expressed their deep concern at recent developments in the Baltic states. They are keeping all aspects of their relationship with the USSR under review.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Pupils

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a table showing for *(a)* primary school pupils and *(b)* secondary school pupils levels of expenditure per child in education in Cheshire for each year since 1978-79 in (i) cash terms and (ii) constant price terms.

Mr. Fallon: The available information is given in the table.

Cheshire LEA—net institutional expenditure per pupil[1]

Year	*Nursery and Primary*[2] *schools*		*Secondary schools*	
	cash terms (£)	*real terms*[3] *(£)*	*cash terms (£)*	*real terms*[3] *(£)*
1978-79	340	745	495	1,090
1979-80	400	755	580	1,090
1980-81	510	810	735	1,170
1981-82	580	840	815	1,185
1982-83	660	895	890	1,205
1983-84	665	865	940	1,220
1984-85	715	880	1,010	1,245
1985-86	760	890	1,090	1,275
1986-87	825	935	1,235	1,395
1987-88	900	965	1,410	1,515
1988-89	960	960	1,545	1,545

[1] The figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to DOE and pupil number returns to DES.

[2] Figures for nursery and primary schools were not collected separately from 1987-88. Figures for all years include nursery and primary schools.

[3] The cash figures for earlier years have been repriced to 1988-89 prices using the Gross Domestic Product (Market Prices) Deflator.

Music Working Party

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the interim report of the music working party.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the interim report of the national curriculum music working group, and will be publishing it soon.

Child Abuse

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the changes he has introduced in the regime of independent schools as a result of the case involving child abuse at Crookham Court school in Berkshire;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to require head teachers always to inform the police and his Department when a member of staff is required to leave a school because of child abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: During the past 18 months, my right hon. and learned Friend has introduced further measures to reduce the risk of pupils in independent schools being subject to physical or sexual abuse by members of staff. The measures described later in my reply strengthen the pre-existing procedures under the Education Acts 1944 and 1981; in addition the provisions of section 87 of the Children Act 1989, which includes a new statutory welfare duty on proprietors and those responsible for running certain independent boarding schools, will be brought into effect in October 1991. From the same date, certain independent schools with 50 boarders or fewer will need to register as children homes and will be subject to regulations, including on welfare, to be made under section 63 of that Act.

The Registrar of Independent Schools reminded proprietors on 30 April 1990 of their existing statutory duty to report to the Secretary of State instances where teachers are dismissed on grounds of misconduct or resign in circumstances where dismissal would have been considered. The letter also gave detailed guidance about the standing arrangements for schools to vet prospective employees, noting that in all cases referred to the Department a check would automatically be made of the list of people deemed unsuitable for employment in maintained schools—list 99.

It has also been decided that Her Majesty's inspectors visiting provisionally registered schools for final registration, or on routine visits to registered independent schools will now inquire whether appropriate checks have been made in the case of all recent staff appointments.

In the case of independent schools seeking approval under section 11 of the Education Act 1981 to admit pupils with special educational needs, Her Majesty's inspectors will include in their regular schedule of questions the inquiry whether appropriate checks have been made, including of list 99 in relation to staff appointments.

In order to monitor the volume of enquiries from independent schools about list 99, and so that in any cases of doubt the facts can be verified, the Department has invited those organisations and agencies in the independent schools field who are authorised holders of the list to keep a record of the enquiries they receive. This information, together with the records kept by the Department's teachers misconduct division, will give the Secretary of State a clearer picture in future of how fully the list is being used.

Where it comes to the notice of the Secretary of State that there has been a failure on the part of an independent school adequately to check the background of a teacher or other member of staff and, whether as a consequence of this or otherwise, circumstances have arisen which in his view render the school objectionable in the terms of section 71 of the Education Act 1944, consideration is given to bringing the known facts of the situation directly to the attention of all parents, guardians or agencies who place pupils at the school. In parallel, the Secretary of State will invariably consider the notice of complaint procedure provided for in the Education Act.

In order to provide help and counsel for boarding school pupils who may have worries which they feel they cannot share with staff or other adults, the Department, with the Independent Schools Joint Council, is providing funds for the experimental boarding school line. The line was launched on 13 January and will operate this term and next. We hope that, apart from providing help, the line will give useful indications about the incidence of pupils' problems, including abuse.

Consideration is now being given to how list 99 may be made more comprehensive in its coverage of non-teaching staff, thus supplementing the consultancy service operated by the Department of Health whereby local authorities and voluntary bodies can check the suitability of those they propose to employ in the child care field. This would require that proprietors report to the Secretary of State instances where non-teachers are dismissed on grounds of misconduct or resign in circumstances where dismissal would be considered.

Guidance on the implications for independent schools with boarders of the implementation of the Children Act will be published soon. The Department and Her Majesty's inspectorate will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and the social services inspectorate to devise arrangements and support which will make effective the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils placed on proprietors, or those responsible for running, independent schools with boarders. In particular, it has been agreed that, in their routine visit to schools, social services departments will expect to see firm evidence that proper checks have been conducted on appointment of any staff who are likely to come into regular contact with pupils.

Finally, in order to minimise the danger of exploitation of students attending English language schools in Britain, the then Minister of State wrote to European colleagues in November 1989 drawing attention to the British Council's recognition scheme, and advising use of recognised schools only.

These additional measures are a mark of the seriousness with which the Secretary of State views the need to prevent any possibility of pupils in independent schools being subject to abuse. He is confident that his concern is shared by the vast majority of proprietors, heads and staff of independent schools, and the independent schools associations, and looks to those in schools to take all

reasonable measures to avoid the possibility of abuse, or, in any cases when it does occur, to take swift and decisive action to stop it.

A-Levels

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many A-levels, and at what grades, were obtained per pupil in 1989 and 1990 in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* Humberside.

Mr. Eggar: In the academic year 1988-89, the number of A-level passes, including AS level equivalent, per school leaver, for the areas in question, was as shown. The figures do not include A-levels achieved in colleges of further education. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

	A-AS levels per pupil
Lincolnshire	0·40
Humberside	0·38
All-England	0·55

GCSE

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many general certificate of secondary education passes per pupil were obtained in 1989 and 1990 in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* Humberside.

Mr. Eggar: Amongst pupils aged 16 in the academic year 1988-89, the number of GCSEs at grade G or above achieved per pupil, for the areas in question, was as follows. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

GCSE grades A to G
Per pupil, aged 16

	Per pupil
Lincolnshire	6·66
Humberside	6·32
All-England	6·58

Religious Education

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will meet the director of education in Northumberland to discuss the booklet "Religious Education: Topics for the Middle School" and its consistency with the requirement to teach Christianity in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans for such a meeting. I have taken steps to obtain a copy of the booklet in question and will write to my hon. Friend when I have had an opportunity to consider it.

Grants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out, at current prices, the value per child in each maintained sector school of education support grants and local education authority training grants.

Mr. Eggar: In 1990-91, the grant payable to local authorities under the education support grants and local education authority training grants schemes represents nationally an average of some £26 per pupil in local education authority-maintained schools.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out, at current prices, the value of the special purpose grant (development) for each child in a grant-maintained school.

Mr. Eggar: In 1990-91, special purpose grant (development) of some £26 per pupil is available to grant-maintained schools.

Bullers Wood School

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he received about the admissions policy, including catchment area, for Bullers Wood grant-maintained school in the London borough of Bromley.

Mr. Eggar: The Secretary of State approved Bullers Wood school as grant maintained on 10 October 1990. There have been no representations to the Secretary of State concerning the admissions policy of Bullers Wood grant-maintained school.

Annual Maintenance Grant

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out the basis on which the grant maintained schools' central annual maintenance grant has been calculated at 16 per cent. in the letter of 27 December 1990 to the chief education officer from the head of the grant maintained schools division; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The 16 per cent. is currently the average central annual maintenance grant figure for grant-maintained schools in this financial year. The individual figure for each current grant-maintained school has been calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Education (Grant-Maintained Schools) (Finance) Regulations 1990—S.I. 1990/549.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

Housing Executive

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the public liability claims against the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, area by area, for the years 1985 to 1990.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who has advised me that the number of claims made against the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, by region for 1985-86 to 1989-90 is as follows:

Public liability claims against the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
Belfast	1,331	1,458	1,468	1,459	967
South East	413	456	519	454	338
South	371	445	401	281	367
North East	316	385	390	443	414
North West	701	748	697	620	421
West	198	182	202	200	161
Total	3,330	3,674	3,677	3,457	2,668

District Councils

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all bodies and organisations in Northern Ireland to which district councils have the right to nominate members and to which the Government also nominate members.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* The information is as follows:

Eastern Health and Social Services Board
Northern Health and Social Services Board
Southern Health and Social Services Board
Western Health and Social Services Board
The Senate of the Queen's University of Belfast
The Court of the University of Ulster
The Trustees of the Ulster Museum
The Trustees of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
The Board of Governors of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Belfast Education and Library Board
South Eastern Education and Library Board
Western Education and Library Board
North Eastern Education and Library Board
Southern Education and Library Board
Drainage Council for Northern Ireland
Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Fire Authority for Northern Ireland
Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there is evidence that members of the secret services or the security services sought in 1976 to obstruct any inquiry into events at the Kincora home.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* I have nothing to add to the published conclusions of Sir George Terry's inquiry.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which officials of his Department interviewed persons in the course of duties in connection with the Kincora boys' home from January 1990 to present date.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* None.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now publish the full text of the Terry report into the Kincora boys' home.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of parliamentary questions answered by his Department on the Kincora boys' home.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Forty, according to the parliamentary on-line information system.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1990 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* In 1990 a total of 296,100 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh County museum—an increase of 9·6 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1989.

WALES

Environmental Grant Fund

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to introduce an environmental grant fund for Wales in furtherance of policies set out in "This Common Inheritance" (Cm. 1200); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department will in 1991-92 fund suitable projects from voluntary organisations in the Principality via the special grants (environmental) programme.

As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment told the hon. Gentleman on 19 December 1990 the announcement by the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on that date gave details of his proposals to bring the new environmental grant fund scheme quickly into operation for 1991-92. I shall keep the position under review for next year.

Patients

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many North Wales patients used hospital facilities in Wirral, Liverpool and Manchester in 1989 and 1990; and if he will list each of the hospitals.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The available information relates to 1989-90. A total of 13,063 episodes of in-patient and day case care were received by residents from Clwyd and Gwynedd in Mersey and North West regional health authorities in 1989-90. Of these, 3,745 episodes were received in Liverpool, Wirral, North Manchester, Central Manchester and South Manchester health authorities. Information by hospital is given in the table.

Episodes of in-patient and day case care received by Clwyd and Gwynedd residents in selected health authorities, by hospital, 1989-90

	Number
Liverpool Health Authority:	
Sefton General Hospital	3
St. Paul's Eye Hospital	61
Women's Hospital	78
Dental Hospital	1
Royal Liverpool Hospital	492
Broadgreen Hospital	641
Mill Road Maternity	2
Olive Mount Hospital	1
Alder Hey Children's	744
RLCH Myrtle Street	153
Mossley Hill Hospital	8

	Number
Liverpool Maternity Hospital	64
Wirral Health Authority:	
Arrowe Park District Hospital	87
Clatterbridge Hospital	552
North, Central and South Manchester Health Authorities:	
Ancoats	4
North Manchester General	10
Monsall	13
Booth Hall	11
Manchester RI	116
Barnes	1
Private Patients Home Lorne Street	4
Manchester Eye	10
St. Mary's	19
Cheadle Royal	1
Withington	210
Wythenshawe	55
Christie	399
Not Known	5

Advice and Guidance

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all documents of advice or guidance, all circulars and all other publications it is currently his intention that his Department shall publish in the 12 months from 1 January in respect of *(a)* the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill and *(b)* other aspects of the health service in Wales, together with any projected joint publications.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is not possible to develop such a list but the tables in chapter 4 of "NHS Wales: Agenda for Action", a copy of which is in the Library, identify the key management actions to be addressed in 1991 and beyond.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has offered to Pembrokeshire district health authority and other district health authorities in Wales on the way in which any all-authority national health service trust would operate and the regime under which he would expect such a trust to be regulated in its relations to any purchasing authority and in regard to the national health service directorate in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: All national health service trusts operate under common provisions to provide contractually-based health care to purchasing authorities for their resident populations. The main regulatory factor involving the national health service directorate will be the external finance limit allocated to a trust in any given year.

Pembrokeshire district health authority has received advice on these issues, and others relating to the detail of its own trust proposal and my officials will continue to be available to assist the authority and to other potential applicants in Wales.

United States of America (Agricultural Support)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on direct and indirect support to agriculture by the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Provisional estimates by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development are that total transfers to United States agriculture were some US $67 billion in 1989; and $46 billion of this was directly funded by taxpayers, the remainder by consumers.

New Hospital, West Glamorgan

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his letter to the right hon. Member for Aberavon of 13 September 1990 concerning West Glamorgan area health authority's proposal to build a new hospital, whether he will now announce the Treasury's decision.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Following the submission by West Glamorgan health authority of an approval in principle for the proposed new district general hospital to serve Neath and Port Talbot, the Department requested on 13 September 1990 further information in the form of a business plan. The aim of this business plan is to demonstrate the viability of the development in the new purchaser-provider environment.

The Treasury will reach a decision on the approval in principle submission once this information has been provided.

Salmonella

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had regarding the outbreak of salmonella food poisoning in Ely hospital, Cardiff, in 1990 and its future prevention.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Discussions have taken place between officials of the Welsh Office and the Department of Health about the relevant guidance to the national health service.

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to enable Welsh businesses, especially those in the holiday airline and other fields directly affected by the economic impact of the Gulf crisis, to weather the financial problems facing them at the present time.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government will continue the fight against inflation and the Welsh Office and other agencies will respond swiftly to opportunities as they arise. It is too early to assess the impact which the present action in the Gulf may have upon the Welsh economy.

New Towns

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he has now completed the review of the new town responsibilities of the Development Board for Rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Development Board for Rural Wales and its predecessor body, Mid Wales Development Corporation, have worked effectively to achieve a doubling of the population of Newtown, Powys. With that target virtually reached, I have concluded that further development of the community as a new town—whether on the basis of New Towns Act powers or of other

provisions in the Development of Rural Wales Act—would not be justified. I am now asking the board to dispose of its housing and community assets by 31 March 1993. That transfer will be effected by the provisions of section 172 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. I am also asking the board to intensify its consideration of means by which its industrial and commercial assets in Newtown can be disposed of to the private sector on acceptable terms.

Teacher Training

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to examine the needs and provision of in-service teacher training in relation to the requirements of the national curriculum in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Yesterday I approved the setting up of an advisory group to act as forum for the exchange of ideas, view points and initiatives on national curriculum teacher training and related activities.

The membership will consist of representatives from local authorities, the Welsh Joint Education Committee, the Curriculum Council for Wales and other bodies currently involved in the field of education. This group will have the status of an advisory non-departmental public body.

National Curriculum

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce his conclusions on the application of the national curriculum in Wales for key stage 4.

Mr. David Hunt: I have considered the need for flexibility and pupil choice in key stage 4 of the national curriculum in Wales, and have sought the views of the Curriculum Council for Wales, local education authorities and other interested parties. After consideration of their responses, and subject to the satisfactory completion of the necessary statutory procedures, I intend that key stage 4 of the national curriculum in Wales should comprise the following elements:

All pupils should study English, mathematics, science and, where Welsh is a core subject in Welsh-speaking schools, Welsh to GCSE level. All pupils should study technology and a modern foreign language in key stage 4 but not necessarily to GCSE level; where Welsh is a non-core foundation subject this will also be the requirement, except for those pupils attending schools which are exempted from the compulsory teaching of Welsh at key stage 4. Pupils should be required to study a full course to GCSE in either history or geography or shorter courses in both these subjects, possibly taken in combination. All pupils in Wales should undertake physical education as a compulsory subject during key stage 4.

In reaching my conclusions I have not overlooked the importance of art, music and other creative subjects. Although I do not propose that art and music should be compulsory at key stage 4, I would encourage schools to develop in their pupils a lasting interest in creative activity throughout their compulsory schooling both within the formal curriculum and through extra-curricular activity. Thus I would expect all schools to offer art and music, and the other foundation subjects, to GCSE level to allow pupils to continue their studies if they so choose.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Visual Handicap

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many registered *(a)* blind people and *(b)* partially sighted people will receive within the disability living allowance (i) lower rate attendance component, (ii) middle rate attendance component, (iii) higher rate attendance component, (iv) lower rate mobility component and (v) higher rate mobility component.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Caenarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 18 December at column *138* which gives the numbers of visually impaired people expected to qualify for each of the rates of the disability living allowance. These figures, of course, include those who are registered blind or partially sighted.

Rebates (War Pensioners)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward legislation to require local authorities to disregard war pensions in the calculation of housing benefit and community charge rebate; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Local authorities already have the discretion to disregard war widow's and war disablement pension in excess of the statutory £10 weekly disregard when assessing entitlement to housing benefit and community charge benefit. The special payments for pre-1973 war widows—presently £40 weekly—are fully disregarded. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Benefits and Allowances

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people made a fresh claim or renewal claim for attendance allowance within the last year; how many fresh claims were awarded the higher rate, the lower rate and how many were denied benefit; how many people originally denied attendance allowance are awarded benefit on review; how many people awarded the lower rate of attendance allowance were subsequently paid the higher rate upon requesting a review; how many people awarded attendance allowance at the lower rate lost the benefit entirely as a result of requesting a review; what is the average period for which attendance allowance is paid; in how many cases attendance allowance is paid in respect of babies under two years, and of these how many are awarded the higher and lower rates; what is the average length of time from a claim for attendance allowance and the time the claimant is notified of the decision; and what is the average time taken from the request for a review to the time of a decision.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

—In 1989 there were 365,000 initial claims to attendance allowance.

—In 1989 of the decisions on initial claims to attendance allowance 84,000 resulted in an award at the higher rate, 145,000 in an award at the lower rate and 101,000 were rejected. These decisions do not exclusively relate to the claims received in the same period.

—The total number of awards of attendance allowance, including renewal claims, where the award changed from the lower to the higher rate for the 12 month period ending 30 September 1990 was 31,000.

—In the period April 1990 to December 1990 there were 4,800 awards of attendance allowance to children under two years.

—The average clearance time for initial claims to attendance allowance was 7·2 weeks for the year 1989-90.

—The average clearance time for attendance allowance reviews was 13·9 weeks for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether all rates of the proposed disability allowance will be disregarded in full for the purpose of calculating income-related benefits.

Mr. Scott: Disability living allowance will be treated in exactly the same way in the calculation of income-related benefits as the two benefits it will replace: attendance allowance for those disabled before age 65 and mobility allowance. As with attendance allowance, the care component will be regarded as available to help meet the care costs of income support claimants in residential care and nursing homes. Otherwise all rates of the new benefit will be wholly disregarded in calculating entitlement to income-related benefits.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the qualifying conditions for each component and each rate of the proposed disability allowance.

Mr. Scott: The conditions of entitlement to disability living allowance are set out in the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill currently before Parliament and in the notes on clauses, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many local offices of his Department exceeded their social fund allocations for *(a)* budgeting loans, *(b)* crisis loans and *(c)* community care grants between the time of the High Court decision in February and the issue of new directions in September.

Mr. Scott: No office exceeded its social fund allocation for either loans or grants as a result of the judicial review. Further allocations were made where necessary to offices which faced additional expenditure following the review. Lists of those allocations were placed in the Library in March and September 1990.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the standard rates for the cost of care and maximum rates now payable from the independent living fund; and how these rates were fixed.

Miss Widdecombe: The standard hourly rates for the cost of care and the overall maximum amounts payable from the independent living fund are set out in the table.

In setting these amounts the trustees of the fund had regard to the cost of care provided by private carers and by care agencies in different parts of the country.

Area	*Hourly rate (£) (day care)*	*Night care (£) (per night)*	*Overall maximum (£) (weekly)*
London	4·50	30	400
South[1]	4·00	30	380
Elsewhere	3·50	25	325

[1] Southern counties of England excluding Devon, Cornwall, Norfolk and Suffolk, up to the northern borders of Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

Refurbishment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area, what refurbishment plans are being considered; what is the nature of the work envisaged; and when was the last time they were each refurbished.

Miss Widdecombe: Two offices are involved.

Doncaster East, St. Peters House: the caller area was upgraded two years ago and recent improvements have been made to the staff areas. Future proposals involve refurbishment of all the toilets and further improvements to staff and caller areas, including the provision of wheelchair access. Full redecoration is planned for 1994.

Doncaster West, Castle House: the caller area was upgraded two years ago and recent improvements have been made to the staff areas. Refurbishment of all toilets commenced in 1989. Future plans include improvements to the main foyer, staff restaurant and car park.

Social Fund Loans (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund loan applications were refused by each of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area during the financial years *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990-91 to date, due to perceived inability to repay; and what advice was recommended to those refused.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the number of applications recorded as refused on grounds of inability to repay.

	April 1989-March 1990	*April 1990-December 1990*
Doncaster East	31	33
Doncaster West	107	43
Wath on Dearne	31	35

All decision letters advise applicants of their right to ask for a review and refer to the citizens advice bureau or local law centre as a source of general advice. Money advice is normally offered to applicants found to be in financial difficulty, including such cases where an applicant is refused because of a perceived inability to repay.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in the *Official Report* the temperatures used to trigger severe weather payments recorded at the Eskdalemuir weather station for each day during the last two weeks of 1990 and the first two weeks of 1991.

Mr. Scott: A weather station will trigger if there has been a period of seven consecutive days, during which the average mean daily temperature is 0 deg. C or less.

Eskdalemuir weather station did not trigger on any day during the last two weeks of 1990, or the first two weeks of

1991. The mean temperature for the seven days ending Sunday 13 January was recorded as −0·8 deg. C when the station did trigger.

Full details of average mean daily temperatures recorded at all the weather stations can be found in the Library.

Pensioners

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the levels of pension and other items of support for pensioners available in each of the EC countries indicating where appropriate the level of contribution by the individual.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the 1989 edition of the Department's publication "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the European Communities", a copy of which is in the Library. These set out the social security arrangements in the 12 member states of the EC, showing both national currency and sterling equivalent, converted according to the purchasing power parity figures as explained in the introduction to the tables. The 1990 tables will be available shortly. I regret that information on other items of support for pensioners in other EC countries is not generally available.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance has been given to his Department's officers on dealing with claims for the severe disability premium in the light of commissioners' decision CIS 372/90.

Miss Widdecombe: To date no formal guidance has been issued in the light of this decision which is the subject of appeal proceedings.

Mobility Costs

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the tables in the OPCS reports which indicate the mobility costs of people with behaviour disorders as against those of people with physical handicaps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 20 December 1990]:* The information requested is not contained in the tables published in the OPCS reports. We have conducted our own detailed analysis from the OPCS data of the people who were receiving mobility allowance at the time the survey was carried out, compared with those whom we expect to come onto the new lower rate of the disability living allowance. This analysis of the OPCS data indicates that those already in receipt of mobility allowance had total extra costs of around £13 per week, compared with on average around £6 per week for those who are expected to receive the new lower rate mobility component. The figure of £13 would, of course, be lower if everyone with a physical handicap, including many with comparatively minor physical ailments and thus not receiving mobility allowance, were included.

EMPLOYMENT

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to increase the grant threshold per capita for the sheltered placement scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: We are currently considering this matter and hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the relationship between TECs and compacts.

Mr. Jackson: TECs, with local education authority agreement, may take up contracts for existing compacts currently held with my Department. Additionally, TECs will be asked to establish compacts in those remaining urban programme authority areas in England which are not currently covered by compact arrangements.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives exist to assist the disabled to gain employment within the technology-based industries.

Mr. Jackson: My Department's sheltered employment programme provides employment opportunities in technology-based industries, among others, for people with severe disabilities. The special aids to employment scheme includes the provision of special computer equipment and other technological aids which are designed to help people with disabilities to get and keep jobs; these aids can be used by people working in technology-based industries. Among the training opportunities provided through the employment training and youth training programmes, information technology centres have a good record of providing technology related training for people with disabilities.

My Department has many other specialist and general services which can help people with disabilities find work, including employment in technology-based industries.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives he has undertaken over the past three years to encourage employers to provide work place facilities which would assist the employment of disabled persons.

Mr. Jackson: My Department operates a number of initiatives, including:

(a) The Disablement Advisory Service which helps employers of all sizes and in all types of industry and commerce to adopt and implement good policies and practices in the employment of people with disabilities;

(b) A range of special schemes available to help with the employment of people with disabilities, in particular: special aids to employment scheme which provides special equipment which someone with a disability needs to do a particular job; adaptations to premises and equipment scheme which provides a grant towards the cost of necessary adaptations to an employer's premises or equipment to enable someone with a disability to be employed; personal reader service which helps with the cost of a sighted reader for visually handicapped people.

(c) The sheltered employment programme, within which the sheltered placement scheme provides integrated employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities and sheltered workshops provide jobs in Remploy factories and with local authorities and voluntary bodies;
(d) The code of good practice on the employment of disabled people, launched in 1984, which offers practical guidance to employers on adopting good policies and practices in the employment of people with disabilities;
(e) A new symbol launched on 16 October 1990 which gives employers a simple, practical and effective means of showing that they are committed to good policies and practices in the employment of people with disabilities.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the numbers of disabled people who are self-employed.

Mr. Jackson: Research commissioned by my Department's employment service and undertaken by Social and Community Planning Research estimated that there were 143,000 people with disabilities in self-employment. The findings of this research were published in "Employment and Handicap", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the numbers of disabled people employed within the area of information technology.

Mr. Jackson: Information is not available in the form requested. However, a report of research commissioned by my Department's employment service and undertaken by Social and Community Planning Research contains some information on the type of work undertaken by people with disabilities. A copy of the report, "Employment and Handicap" is in the Library.

Road Transport Industry Training Board

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which sources of information are used by the road transport industry training board to ensure that all relevant businesses comply with the levy regulations.

Mr. Jackson: The road transport industry training board uses all relevant sources of information including local knowledge from its training officers, trade and local press and information supplied by employers. These sources are used as the basis for enquiries to companies to ascertain if they are in-scope to the board's levy regulations. Payment of levy is based on statutory returns provided by in-scope companies.

Sky Television

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits for Australian and New Zealand citizens have *(a)* been applied for and *(b)* been granted in respect of applications from Sky Television and British Sky Broadcasting in each of the past three years.

Mr. Jackson: No applications for a citizen of New Zealand has been made by either company in the last three years. Sky Television applied for and was granted one work permit in 1989 and one in 1990 in respect of Australian citizens.

SCOTLAND

Schools

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total capital expenditure on local authority schools in Scotland in each year since 1978, in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is given in the table which has been compiled from local authority financial returns. The fall in expenditure in real terms during the period reflects a substantial and progressive decline in pupil numbers which has reduced the requirement for new school building.

Capital expenditure by local authorities on schools

£ million

Year	*At outturn prices*	*At 1989-90 prices*
1978-79	51·885	121·400
1979-80	47·598	95·448
1980-81	52·391	88·783
1981-82	60·404	93·350
1982-83	52·378	75·577
1983-84	45·416	62·635
1984-85	45·945	60·302
1985-86	51·124	63·634
1986-87	46·672	56·172
1987-88	47·742	54·492
1988-89	59·392	63·178
1989-90	67·335	67·335

The figures include expenditure on nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.

Outturn figures have been converted to 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator.

River Pollution

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Clyde Purification Board to discuss the likely effects of opencast mining in the Douglas valley; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of the Clyde river purification board for this purpose and he has no plans to do so.

Discharges of trade effluent from opencast mines require the consent of the appropriate river purification board; applications for consent are advertised in accordance with section 36(1)(a) of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Any representations received about the likely effects of such discharges on the water environment are carefully considered by the board in deciding whether, and subject to what conditions, consent should be granted.

The Gulf

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers and categories of NHS staff who are being called up for military service in the Gulf; and what assessment he has made of the consequences of this call-up on the finances of the NHS, and on the quality of service and waiting lists at hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 119 NHS staff in Scotland have been called up for military service in categories as follows:

Category	Number
Doctors	27
Nurses	74
Laboratory staff	4
Paramedical staff	4
Administrative/Clerical staff	4
Pharmacy staff	2
Ancillary staff	3
Ambulanceman	1

The call up will have some effect on the finances of the NHS but it is not possible to quantify at this stage.

The effect on quality of service and hospital waiting lists cannot readily be determined. The number of staff being called up is a very small percentage of the total and I would expect health boards to maintain the highest level and quality of service to patients.

Overseas Voters

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many former British residents living overseas have applied to be registered for voting in general elections for each constituency in Scotland under the Representation of the People Act 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on overseas electors is not held centrally. The Government intend to obtain this information from electoral registration officers and to present it to Parliament early in 1991.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the latest list of hospitals in Strathclyde which are known to him or the relevant health boards to be considering trust status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All hospitals and other units within the national health service have been encouraged to consider the possibility of national health service trust status.

Health Service

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are the executive powers of the health board general managers group; and what is its relationship to himself and to the national health service chief executive;

(2) on what basis the health board general managers group may jointly implement Whitley council agreements based on local health board flexibility;

(3) for what reasons the health board general managers group is to use the HAY job evaluation system as part of the process of implementing advanced letter (PTB) 3/90; and if the decision is binding on all health boards in Scotland;

(4) who authorised the health board general managers group to consider joint implementation of advanced letter (PTB) 3/90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health board general managers as a group have no executive powers and are not responsible for implementing Whitley council agreements; the conclusions they may reach on the matters that come before them are not binding on individual health boards. The chief executive, with his senior colleagues, meets general managers regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Individual health boards will implement advance letter (PTB) 3/90, and will each consider whether there would be advantage in adopting the HAY job evaluation system for works and estates staff. The steps taken by individual health boards to implement the agreement in their areas will follow the procedures prescribed in the advance letter.

Only health boards are authorised to implement Whitley council agreements which allow local health board flexibility.

Health Boards

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial allocations he has made to health boards for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has allocated £2,505·735 million to health boards to meet their expenditure commitment on hospital and community health services in 1991-92. The figure includes £2,244·950 million to meet gross recurrent expenditure commitments, £208·575 million to meet gross capital expenditure commitments, £38·857 million for GP team staff £11·353 million for GP premises and £2 million for GP computers.

The allocation, taken with health board's own cash-releasing efficiency savings, gives an increase in available resources of 10·75 per cent. It amounts to an extra £225 million for health boards in Scotland.

There has been a substantial increase in the resources for nurse training and for HIV and AIDS related services and an additional moneys have been made available to help reduce junior doctors' hours.

Having adjusted for the movement of resources from revenue to capital to account for the new definition of capital, the gross capital amounts available to boards will be £208 million, representing a 10·8 per cent. increase over 1990-91. The capital allocation will continue the high level of investment in hospital building projects of recent years. Substantial investment will be made in major hospital projects now under construction including Ayr hospital, the St. John's hospital in Lothian, the Royal Cornhill hospital in Grampian, the Perth royal infirmary, Tayside, the Western Isles hospital in Stornoway, West Fife DGH phase II in Dunfermline, the spinal injuries unit at Southern general hospital, Glasgow and Udston hospital in Lanark. It will also provide the resources to progress new hospital developments at Oban, Campbeltown, Elgin, Peterhead and Crieff and for improvements to GP surgeries in highland and the island boards.

Details of individual board allocations are contained in the table:

Health board allocations: 1991-92

Health board	HCH revenue allocation[1] £000s	Final allocation for practice team staff 1991-92 £000s	Final allocation for premises 1991-92 £000s	HCH capital allocation[1] £000s
Argyll and Clyde	158,821	2,934	680	11,385
Ayrshire and Arran	124,971	2,653	800	13,480
Borders	37,567	760	50	1,299
Dumfries and Galloway	60,541	1,020	600	3,231
Fife	116,411	2,383	720	32,616
Forth Valley	108,657	2,097	500	4,813
Grampian	204,419	4,218	1,100	17,752
Greater Glasgow	529,876	7,561	1,400	26,489
Highland	87,225	1,793	600	4,662
Lanarkshire	181,755	3,317	500	17,565
Lothian	346,505	5,923	2,300	21,321
Orkney	7,190	146	27	444
Shetland	8,130	252	—	1,632
Tayside	201,141	3,392	1,197	15,643
Western Isles	12,360	408	60	13,446
SCOTLAND	2,185,568	38,857	10,534	185,778

[1] These allocations include a transfer of some £25 million from revenue to capital to reflect a change in the definition of capital expenditure from 1 April 1991.

A further £59·140 million revenue, £22·797 million capital and £2·819 million general medical services will be distributed during the year for cardiac surgery, hospice funding, computer development and other specific initiatives.

Health Expenditure

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide *(a)* the total gross allocation to Scotland for health expenditure in the year 1991-92, *(b)* a breakdown of the revenue and capital allocation components of the total gross allocation and *(c)* a breakdown of the total gross allocation and the revenue and capital allocation components of it, for each of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total gross allocation to Scotland for health expenditure in 1991-92 is £3,383 million, of which £3,148 million is for revenue expenditure. As regards revenue and capital allocations to individual health boards, I refer the hon. Member to my answer today to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker).

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the extent of the importation of waste materials into Scotland during *(a)* 1987-88, *(b)* 1988-89 and *(c)* 1989-90 by major subject heading; and if he will divide these data into hazardous, toxic or other waste.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Waste disposal authorities have reported imports of waste to Scotland for the calendar years 1987, 1988 and 1989 as shown in the following table. Imports of "toxic waste" are not separately identified but 942 tonnes of "other waste" — neither "special" nor "hazardous"—were imported from England and Wales in 1989, the only year for which such figures are available.

"Hazardous waste" is defined in the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988, which govern movements of such waste into and out of Great Britain. "Special waste" is defined in the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, which relate to movements of such waste within Great Britain.

Year	Type of waste	Quantity (Tonnes)
1987	Waste imported from outside Great Britain	15
	Special waste imported from England and Wales	[1]—
1988	Hazardous waste imported from outside Great Britain	453
	Special waste imported from England and Wales	4,867
1989	Hazardous waste imported from outside Great Britain	480
	Special waste imported from England and Wales	1,000

[1] Information not available centrally.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of Scottish Homes sales under the rents to mortgage scheme in each of Scottish Homes district office areas from October 1989 to the nearest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

Position at 31 December 1990

Scottish Homes district office area	Sales
Edinburgh	3
Lothian and Borders	28
Central	9
Fife	11
Grampian	17
Tayside	7
Highlands and Islands	4
Lanarkshire	2
Renfrew and Inverclyde	14
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway	8
Glasgow North and East	6
Glasgow South	1
Glasgow West	1
TOTAL	111

In addition, nine sales have been made to tenants of new town development corporations.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what income Scottish Homes received in capital receipts from house sales in the third quarter of 1990-91 from *(a)* right-to-buy sales, *(b)* rents-to-mortgage sales, *(c)* sales under the portable discount scheme and *(d)* vacant possession sales.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	£ million
Right to Buy sales	10·430
Rent to Mortgage sales	0·874
Portable Discount scheme	0·276
Vacant Possession sales	0·908
Total	12·488

All the above figures include receipts from miscellaneous items such as building insurance and repair funds. Figures net of these miscellaneous items are not currently available for each type of sale.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what income Scottish Homes has received from *(a)* enabling receipts, *(b)* stock disposal, *(c)* voluntary transfers, *(d)* house sales and *(e)* disposal of non-housing assets in the first, second and third quarters of 1990-91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

	1st Quarter	*2nd Quarter*	*3rd Quarter*	*Total to 31 December 1990*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*
Enabling Receipts	5·713	3·229	6·911	15·853
Stock Disposal	0·613	0·387	0·306	1·306
Voluntary Transfers	—	—	—	—
House Sales	5·131	8·666	12·322	26·119
Disposal of non-Housing Assets	0·024	0·468	0·037	0·529
Total	11·481	12·750	19·576	43·807

Patents

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to simplify the laws concerning the protection of patents in Scotland and establish a Scottish patents court similar to the Patents county court in England.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish arrangements for patent litigation were most recently reviewed by a working party under the chairmanship of the hon. Lord Jauncey which concluded that the Court of Session should retain exclusive jurisdiction and that a number of changes should be made to the rules of court to streamline procedures, avoid unnecessary delays and reduce costs. These changes will shortly be brought into effect by the making of amendments to the rules of court. Patent law in the United Kingdom has recently been amended by parts V and VI of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has no proposals for further changes.

School Leavers

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures available for the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of Scottish school leavers with no qualifications.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number and the percentage of Scottish school leavers who left during session 1988-89 with no Scottish Certificate of Education qualifications were 8,623 and 11·9 per cent. respectively.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a table for recorded crime in Scotland comparable with that provided on 30 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *477-80*, on crime statistics in Strathclyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is available from Scottish Office Home and Health Department statistical bulletins. Information for the years 1980 to 1989 is published in the bulletin entitled "Recorded Crime in Scotland, 1989", and for the year 1979 is published in "Recorded Crime in Scotland, 1988". Copies of these bulletins are in the Library.

M8 (Lighting)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to light the M8 motorway from the St. James intersection at Glasgow airport to Greenock.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what it costs to clean up the oil spillage around the coast of the River Clyde resulting from the accident caused by the Argyle and Clyde health board; and which bodies paid for this.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Business Rates

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of non-payment of business rates for the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 in Strathclyde region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available centrally.

Procurator Fiscal Service

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vacancies and at what grades exist for professionally qualified staff in the procurator fiscal service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are seven vacancies at legal assistant grade.

Courts Vacancies

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vacancies and at what grades exist for staff in the employment of Scottish courts administrations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 14 January 1991, there were seven unfilled posts in the Scottish court service, three in the AO grade, two in the typist grades, and two in the support grades.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vacancies and at what grades exist for staff in the general department of the Court of Session.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no vacancies at any grade in the general department of the Court of Session.

Civil Servants

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants and at what grades are currently employed in the private offices of Ministers in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

Grade	*Number*
Grade 5	1
Senior Executive Officer	1
Higher Executive Officer	2
Higher Executive Officer (Development)	3
Executive Officer	4
Adminstrative Officer	6
Personal Secretary	7
Typist	1

In addition, one special adviser is attached to my office.

Further Education Unit

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has completed his examination of the case for a Scottish further education unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Consideration of the case has now been completed and my right hon. Friend and I have decided to reconstitute the curriculum advice and support team—CAST—as a Scottish further education unit with effect from 1 April 1991. The new unit will continue to be located at Jordanhill college, but will have a wider remit than CAST to enable it to provide better support to further education colleges in implementing the Government's recent reforms of college management. It will also be well placed to meet new needs such as those arising from the completion of the single European market when greater labour mobility will have implications for vocational education and training.

In addition to core funding of £294,000 for 1991-92, a further £150,000 will be made available from 1 April 1991. From 1 April 1992 an additional £150,000 will be made available by the transfer of a proportion of the in-service training funding currently made to the Jordanhill college by the Scottish Office education department. I expect the new unit to liaise closely with the Scottish school of further education, Jordanhill college, and others active in further education in Scotland to meet our needs for a highly skilled work force.

Education (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the allocated expenditure for local authority capital expenditure on education in Scotland in every year since 1979 at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* Details of consents to local authorities to incur capital expenditure on educational building are given in the table:

Capital consent allocations for educational building
£ million at 1990-91 prices

Year	*Allocations*
1979-80	116·094
1980-81	97·838
1981-82	93·826
1982-83	75·562
1983-84	68·002
1984-85	57·138
1985-86	67·583
1986-87	59·767
1987-88	63·083
1988-89	64·123
1989-90	66·695
1990-91	61·669

Fish Marketing

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the grant of European Community or national funds for the marketing and processing of fisheries and aquaculture produce and the improvement of facilities at fishing ports under EC regulation 4028/86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1991]:* Support for the processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture produce has been available until recently under EC regulation 355/77. Scottish companies have a high success rate: since the inception of the scheme over 130 awards have been made attracting 25 per cent. grant worth some £9 million. In the last round, 11 companies were awarded £1·1 million in December 1990. Successful projects also receive United Kingdom Government grant of at least 8 per cent. of project costs.

Regulation 355/77 is being replaced, but support will continue. Bilateral discussions with the European Commission on a Community support framework for the United Kingdom under EC regulation 4042/89 are at an advanced stage. Agreement is expected next month opening the way for EC grant aid for projects seeking to improve the marketing and processing of fisheries and aquaculture produce. Administrative arrangements for the new scheme are already in place with an EC grant rate of up to 30 per cent. being available for Scottish projects along with a national back-up grant of 5 per cent.

United Kingdom companies may apply for grants for the improvement of facilities at fishing ports under EC regulation 4028/86. Two Scottish applications have already been successful in this regard and four new applications are with the Commission for consideration.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1990 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down into the

individual institutions but including their outstations, with the figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The information is as follows:

	1990	*Percentage Change since 1989*
National Galleries of Scotland	808,803	+13·98
National Museums of Scotland	1,001,827	+11·39

The national galleries of Scotland comprise the national gallery of Scotland, the Scottish national gallery of modern art and the Scottish national portrait gallery. The national museums of Scotland comprise the royal museum of Scotland buildings at Chambers street and Queen street, Edinburgh, the Scottish agricultural museum, the Scottish united services museum, the museum of flight and the Shambellie museum of costume.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of people registered for community charge payments in each regional authority for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will list the percentage changes in each case compared with the previous year's figures.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The available information, obtained from returns by community charges registration officers, is set out in the table. The figures include students, who are liable for only 20 per cent. of the community charge, but exclude those liable for collective or standard charges. The October 1988 figures were provisional, and unavailable for some areas.

	October 1988	*September 1989*	*July 1990*	*Percentage change 1988 to 1989*	*Percentage change 1989 to 1990*
Borders	82,840	77,935	78,285	−5·9	0·4
Central	n/a	206,389	204,412	n/a	−1·9
Dumfries and Galloway	110,859	111,326	111,434	0·4	0·1
Fife	253,500	269,058	259,961	6·1	−3·4
Grampian	377,766	377,785	373,581	0·0	−1·1
Highland	n/a	147,771	148,270	n/a	0·3
Lothian	589,209	604,320	578,982	2·6	−4·2
Strathclyde	1,786,017	1,761,450	1,737,284	−1·4	−1·4
Tayside	290,700	295,490	291,682	1·6	−1·3
Orkney	14,775	14,329	14,372	−3·0	0·3
Shetland	16,459	16,021	15,982	−2·7	−0·2
Western Isles	n/a	22,315	22,165	n/a	−0·7
All Scotland total	n/a	3,904,189	3,834,410	n/a	−1·8

n/a: Not available.

Electoral Registers

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of electors registered in each Scottish parliamentary constituency for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will list the percentage changes which have taken place in each case compared with the previous year's figures.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The information is set out in the table.

Constituency	*Electoral register 1988*	*Percentage change*	*Electoral register 1989*	*Percentage change*	*Electoral register 1990*	*Percentage change*
Aberdeen North	62,075	−2·63	60,604	−2·37	60,640	+0·06
Aberdeen South	60,323	−4·69	58,946	−2·28	59,420	+0·80
Angus East	61,643	+0·07	61,899	+0·42	62,136	+0·38
Argyll and Bute	48,912	−0·73	48,695	−0·44	48,695	−0·13
Ayr	67,063	−0·24	66,545	−0·77	66,545	−0·04
Banff and Buchan	63,054	+0·30	62,829	−0·36	64,248	+2·26
Caithness and Sutherland	30,978	−1·72	31,031	+0·17	30,701	−1·06
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	56,708	−0·85	56,343	−0·64	56,290	−0·09
Central Fife	56,440	−0·40	56,183	−0·46	56,249	+0·12
Clackmannan	49,127	−0·92	48,757	−0·75	48,902	+0·30
Clydebank and Milngavie	50,128	−1·37	49,178	−1·90	48,365	−1·65
Clydesdale	62,602	+0·28	62,456	−0·23	62,392	−0·10
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	46,392	+0·55	46,345	−0·10	46,723	+0·82
Cunninghame North	55,566	+0·04	55,262	−0·55	55,584	+0·58
Cunninghame South	50,414	−0·25	49,931	−0·96	49,931	—
Dumbarton	59,369	−0·56	58,328	−1·75	58,044	−0·49
Dumfries	59,972	−0·03	59,962	−0·02	61,057	+1·83
Dundee East	61,221	−0·21	60,394	−1·35	59,147	−2·07
Dundee West	61,445	−1·61	60,246	−1·95	60,197	−0·08
Dunfermline East	51,008	−1·32	50,894	−0·22	50,746	−0·29
Dunfermline West	51,384	−0·38	51,412	+0·05	51,445	+0·06

Constituency	Electoral register 1988	Percentage change	Electoral register 1989	Percentage change	Electoral register 1990	Percentage change
East Kilbride	63,956	−0·07	63,715	−0·38	64,206	+0·77
East Lothian	65,542	−0·09	66,108	+0·86	67,524	+2·14
Eastwood	62,839	+0·20	63,483	+1·02	64,083	+0·95
Edinburgh Central	58,975	−1·31	57,069	−3·23	57,794	+1·27
Edinburgh East	48,745	−1·00	47,802	−1·93	48,558	+1·58
Edinburgh Leith	60,031	−1·08	58,984	−1·74	59,331	+0·59
Edinburgh Pentlands	58,884	+0·40	58,538	−0·59	57,280	−2·15
Edinburgh South	64,026	−0·31	62,452	−2·46	62,205	−0·40
Edinburgh West	62,652	−0·12	61,172	−2·36	60,840	−0·54
Falkirk East	52,737	−0·57	52,679	−0·11	52,514	−0·31
Falkirk West	50,606	−0·20	50,506	−0·20	50,739	+0·46
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	53,621	−0·69	53,481	−0·26	54,512	+1·93
Glasgow Cathcart	48,767	−2·14	47,702	−2·18	46,861	−1·76
Glasgow Central	50,867	−1·33	50,535	−0·65	49,943	−1·17
Glasgow Garscadden	46,916	−3·24	44,828	−4·45	43,397	−3·19
Glasgow Govan	50,190	−1·88	48,908	−2·55	48,089	−1·67
Glasgow Hillhead	57,704	−0·93	56,718	−1·71	56,631	−0·15
Glasgow Maryhill	52,039	−1·72	50,589	−2·79	49,316	−2·52
Glasgow Pollock	50,829	−2·29	49,497	−2·62	48,317	−2·38
Glasgow Provan	42,908	−3·35	41,086	−4·25	39,966	−2·73
Glasgow Rutherglen	56,929	−1·97	55,695	−2·17	54,920	−1·40
Glasgow Shettleston	53,883	−0·63	53,254	−1·17	52,973	−0·53
Glasgow Springburn	50,489	−3·21	48,785	−3·37	47,612	−2·40
Gordon	75,228	+1·39	75,534	+0·41	77,974	+3·23
Greenock and Port Glasgow	57,339	−1·97	55,612	−3·01	54,564	−1·89
Hamilton	63,167	+0·02	62,688	−0·76	63,127	+0·70
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	66,695	−0·95	67,262	+0·85	68,011	+1·11
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	63,325	−0·18	62,834	−0·78	62,982	+0·24
Kincardine and Deeside	64,398	+0·28	64,427	+0·05	65,492	+1·65
Kirkcaldy	53,823	−0·18	53,626	−0·37	53,067	−1·04
Linlithgow	60,584	+0·95	61,135	+0·91	61,786	+1·06
Livingston	58,008	+1·36	59,533	+2·63	60,868	+2·24
Midlothian	61,139	+0·01	61,089	−0·08	60,982	−0·18
Monklands East	50,271	−0·27	49,533	−1·47	49,658	+0·25
Monklands West	51,300	−0·61	50,450	−1·66	50,526	+0·15
Moray	63,206	+0·46	62,838	−0·58	63,309	+0·75
Motherwell North	58,331	−0·36	57,971	−0·62	58,112	+0·24
Motherwell South	52,599	−0·46	51,704	−1·70	51,470	−0·45
North East Fife	52,442	−0·62	52,310	−0·25	52,854	+1·04
North Tayside	54,582	+0·22	54,367	−0·39	54,831	+0·85
Orkney and Shetland	31,180	−0·49	31,116	−0·21	31,094	−0·07
Paisley North	48,973	−2·09	48,213	−1·55	48,208	−0·01
Paisley South	50,403	−2·76	49,595	−1·60	49,363	−0·47
Perth and Kinross	63,957	−0·01	64,505	+0·86	64,669	+0·25
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	57,025	+0·12	57,234	+0·37	57,999	+1·34
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	52,278	−1·00	53,062	+1·50	54,084	+1·93
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	43,631	−0·03	43,484	−0·34	43,675	+0·44
Stirling	58,715	+0·47	58,387	−0·56	58,429	+0·07
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	63,296	−0·45	62,706	−0·93	62,339	−0·59
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	38,438	+0·40	38,773	+0·87	39,204	+1·11
Western Isles	23,085	−2·53	23,097	+0·05	23,084	−0·06

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether he will establish a nationwide scheme of assistance for retirement pensioners to travel at concessionary rates of 75 per cent. or 66 per cent. on road and rail transport in off-peak hours;

(2) whether he will establish a nationwide scheme of assistance for retirement pensioners to travel free on road and rail transport at off-peak hours.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* We have no plans to change the present arrangements. Local authorities already have adequate powers to provide travel concessions in their areas and there are schemes for free or cheap travel on local public transport in all areas of Scotland. Local authorities may, if they choose, act jointly with other local authorities to establish a scheme which would operate throughout their areas. British Rail and the main long distance coach operators also have their own travel concession arrangements.

ENVIRONMENT

Warwickshire County Council

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis his Department assessed Warwickshire county council to earn interest of £6·7 million as set out in the standard spending assessment for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The basis of the assessment is set out in paragraphs 3.50 and 3.51 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) which was approved by the House on 18 January 1990. The assessment for interest receipts is calculated in proportion to an authority's standard spending assessment for all services, except the capital financing element.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been exempted from paying the community charge in each category of exemption in the Doncaster local authority area.

Mr. Key: The information returned by the local authority is as follows:

Numbers of persons exempt from community charge, 1 June 1990

	Number
Severely mentally impaired	418
Patients whose main residence is a National Health Service hospital	545
People whose sole or main residence is in a residential care home, a nursing home, a private hospital or a hostel providing care, who are receiving care	1,676
Aged 18 and in receipt of child benefit, or aged 18 or 19 and on full-time courses of further education	542
Members of religious communities	34
Others[1]	24

[1] People in detention, members of visiting forces, international headquarters and defence organisations and their dependants, including diplomats. These categories have been combined because of the small numbers involved.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table of expenditure on city grant in 1989-90, showing final expenditure for the year broken down by standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

	£
East Midlands	3,368,489
London	695,633
Merseyside	279,238
Northern	1,762,354
North West	1,653,486
South West	16,387
West Midlands	2,957,808
Yorkshire and Humberside	760,632
Total	11,494,027

This excludes city grant in urban development corporations.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table showing the expected income from the uniform business rate in 1990-91, broken down by standard regions with Greater London shown as a separate region and a similar table showing the level of income had no transitional arrangement been in place.

Mr. Key: The information is not available in exactly the form requested. The following table shows the estimated gross income from non-domestic rates for each region before and after the transitional arrangements are applied. The figures do not include the effects of reliefs for empty or charitable property or other reliefs nor any allowance for losses in collection.

	Gross yield (£m)	
	Without transitional arrangements	*With transitional arrangements*
Northern	386	483
Yorks and Humberside	682	800
North West	858	1,100
East Midlands	559	620
West Midlands	713	888
East Anglia	341	316
London	3,462	2,882
South East	2,214	1,985
South West	719	666
England	9,915	9,741

Gross yield without transition is equal to the gross rateable value on proposed local rating lists at 20 December 1989 multiplied by the 1990-91 non-domestic multiplier. Properties on the central rating list and Crown property are excluded.

Building Regulations

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in specifying minimum fire resistance periods for certain building groups in the proposed amendments to approved document B of the Building

Regulations (England and Wales), what account he has taken of the need to provide adequate protection for fire fighters in low rise buildings and basements.

Mr. Yeo: The primary purpose of part B of the Building Regulations 1985 is the protection of life in the event of fire, and the consultation proposals on amendments to these provisions took account of the safety of firefighters as well as of other persons. In the light of comments received, the Fire Advisory Panel and the Building Regulations Advisory Committee are now considering whether the original proposals, including those relating to fire resistance periods, require to be modified to provide a greater degree of protection for fire fighters, particularly in low-rise buildings and basements.

Endangered Species

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he is giving to the possibilities afforded by the DNA techniques developed by Professor Alec Jeffreys, FRS, of the university of Leicester for the enhanced breeding of captive animals from endangered species; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I am aware of the investigations which are being carried out connected with the possible application of Professor Jeffreys' DNA techniques and I recognise that this biotechnology may have a part to play in the conservation of endangered species. However, research is still continuing into these techniques and it is too soon to make a proper assessment of their full potential.

Specialist Housing

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list, for every local authority in England, the number of non-sheltered housing units for the elderly started by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* the private sector in 1989;

(2) if he will list, for each local authority in England, the number of sheltered housing units started by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* the private sector in 1989.

Mr. Yeo: The available figures for starts of newly-built dwellings of these types are published in table 11 of "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales, No. 94, July 1990", a copy of which is in the Library. Local authorities also report the number of their own dwellings which have been converted or improved to provide dwellings suitable for the elderly, both sheltered and other, and this is listed in table 13 of the above publication.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list, for each local authority area in England, the number of specialist housing units for chronically sick and disabled people provided by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* the private sector as of 1989-90;

(2) if he will list, for each local authority in England, the number of specialist units of accommodation available for elderly people provided by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* the private sector as of 1989-90.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of their own dwellings, and estimates of those owned by housing associations and in the private sector, which have been specially designed or adapted for use by the elderly or disabled in their annual Housing Investment Programme returns (HIP1). The available figures for 1 April 1990 appear in "1990 HIP1 All Items Print". Local authority dwellings for the elderly appear in columns A2a1 (sheltered) and A2b1 (others) and for the disabled in columns A2c1 (wheelchair) and A2d1 (other). The small number of dwellings owned by the local authorities outside their areas are shown at columns A2a6 to A2d6. Corresponding figures for housing associations and the private sector appear in columns A2a2 to A2d2, and columns A2a4 to A2d4 respectively. A copy of the document is in the Library.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England, the number of households assessed as needing specialist accommodation for *(a)* the elderly and *(b)* the disabled, in 1989-90.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report estimates of the number of households in their area who require specialist elderly or disabled dwellings in their annual housing investment programme returns (HIP1). The available figures for 1 April 1990 appear in columns B2a1 and B2b1 respectively, of "1990 HIP1 All Items Print". A copy of the document is in the Library.

Rural Housing

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those local authorities which are eligible to bid for a share of the £2 million credit approvals he has announced for low-cost rural housing.

Mr. Yeo: The rural housing programme for 1991-92 totals £50 million of supplementary credit approvals, not £2 million. All English local authorities, except for London boroughs and the City of London, metropolitan district councils, and other districts designated under the urban programme, are eligible to submit bids under the programme.

County Hall, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the maintenance costs of County hall, London SE1, over the past two years.

Mr. Key: I understand from the London residuary body that the cost of maintaining County hall in 1989-90 was £3·8 million and is estimated at £2·7 million for 1990-91. For this purpose maintenance includes security, insurance, cleaning and energy costs as well as repairs and day-to-day maintenance.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the current annualised cost of keeping County hall, London SE1 empty.

Mr. Key: The London residuary body estimates that, if it were not to dispose of County hall in 1991-92, the cost of repairs and maintenance, security, insurance and energy in that year would be £2·5 million.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table of expenditure from his Department on urban development corporations and other forms of public support to urban development corporations in 1989-90, showing separately his Department's grant to urban development corporations and the total cost to the Exchequer of forms of tax reliefs available to urban development corporation areas, with the figures to be shown separately for each urban development corporation.

Mr. Key: Public funding for urban development corporations in 1989-90 was comprised entirely of Departmental grant-in-aid, set out in the table. Tax reliefs are not generally applied to corporation areas, but are available in enterprise zones, some of which overlap with urban development corporation areas. Data on reliefs just for these overlapping areas is not readily available.

1989-90 grant-in-aid

	£ million
Black Country	38·0
Bristol	5·0
Central Manchester	11·0
Leeds	8·75
London Docklands	255·75
Merseyside	23·0
Sheffield	9·5
Teesside	36·009
Trafford Park	13·3
Tyne and Wear	35·8
Total	436·109

Fire Safety

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses there have been to date on his Department's proposed changes to part B of the Building Regulations 1985 relating to the reduction of five resistance periods, increased compartment sizes and relaxation of non-combustibility requirements; and if he will indicate the proportions in favour of these proposals and those against.

Sir George Young: Up to January 18, comments had been received from 220 different organisations, companies and individuals on the proposals for amendments to part B, Safety in fire, of the Building Regulations 1985. Of these:

- 10 per cent. were in favour of and 39 per cent. against the proposals relating to the reduction of fire resistance periods;
- 12 per cent. were in favour of and 27 per cent. against the proposals relating to compartmentation;
- 12 per cent. were in favour of and 20 per cent. against the proposals relating to the relaxation of non-combustibility requirements.

In each case, the remaining respondents expressed no firm view on this aspect of the proposals.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received concerning the volume of toxic materials emitted by incineration of waste and related to the creation and properties of products of incomplete combustion.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The Department has received reports from various sources, particularly Warren Spring laboratory, on emissions from waste incinerators, including information on the main toxic products of incomplete combustion. The most recent report from the Laboratory covering municipal solid waste incineration and dioxins (Ref. LR 776 PA), will be published in April.

Dioxins

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to ban all waste disposal methods and industries which produce dioxins; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Waste incineration is the main identifiable industrial source of dioxins. It is also an important waste disposal option which reduces the pressure on landfill disposal. Emissions of dioxins can however be reduced to levels at or below the level of detection if efficient combustion and abatement is achieved. That is the aim of present controls on the industry in the United Kingdom, including the provisions of the European directives on municipal waste incineration plants.

Local Government

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered proposals other than from parish councils to involve communities in the affairs of local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* A number of district and borough councils have adopted systems to involve their local communities in the delivery of services. This has not involved putting proposals to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to include the financing of parish, community or town councils in the review of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* My right hon. Friend announced on 5 December that we shall be conducting a fundamental review of local government finance and structure. This will include the financing of statutory parish, community and town councils.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's policy on the introduction of parish councils in larger city areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The guidelines to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the circumstances in which they should recommend the creation of parishes in urban areas are set out in paragraphs 14-23 of DOE circular 121/77 of 12 December 1977 (Local Government Act 1972: Parish Reviews).

Disability

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he plans to have with organisations representing disabled people and their

carers, in his review of the community charge, to discuss the effects of the community charge on disabled people and their carers;

(2) what representations his Department has received concerning the impact of the community charge on disabled people and their carers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* I continue to receive representations from such organisations; their views on the community charge will be welcomed by my Department.

Land Development, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the sale by Liverpool city council of public open spaces to developers; if he will call in all development applications involved in inquiries by Merseyside police; if he will hold public inquiries into subsequent applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 45 letters, including those from the hon. Member, and a petition of 65 signatures. He has no plans for calling-in or holding inquiries into planning applications involving investigation by the Merseyside police. As I stated in my reply to a question by the hon. Member on 14 December at col. 518, the Secretary of State is unlikely to intervene unless applications raise planning issues of more than local importance.

Homelessness

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the Government's initiative on homelessness.

Sir George Young: The Government have committed significant resources to reduce the numbers sleeping out in London, to assist local authorities faced with severe homelessness pressures and to provide direct assistance through homelessness advice and support schemes. As I announced on 18 December, we are making available £96 million over three years to provide short-term direct access hostels for people sleeping on the streets and longer term accommodation in housing association flats and houses for those currently in hostels. Nick Hardwick, director of Centrepoint, has joined my team for six months to work on the development of this programme. £300 million is being allocated over this year and next to local authorities and housing associations in London and the south-east in order to reduce the extent to which they have to use bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families. In addition we have expanded support to the voluntary sector to £2 million this year, and £4·5 million next year, to establish a national homelessness advice service and to run practical projects to help single homeless people find temporary and permanent accommodation.

HEALTH

Radiation Treatment

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were damaged by excess radiation treatment at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital, Wonford in Exeter during the period 15 February 1988 to 12 July 1988; how many are alive; how many cases of compensation have been settled on agreed financial terms; and how many are still outstanding.

Mr. Dorrell: A total of 207 patients were treated on the miscalibrated radiotherapy unit. To date, Exeter health authority has been notified of the deaths of 134 patients and so far as the authority is aware the remaining 73 are alive.

I am advised by Exeter health authority that, of the 104 claims received so far, 38 have reached full and final settlement and 21 have reached agreed settlement on the element of the claims concerning pain, suffering and loss of amenity.

AIDS

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been infected by the AIDS virus through the infusion of whole blood or platelets.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people, other than haemophiliacs, are known to have been infected with the HIV virus through national health service blood transfusions; if he will categorise them according to the nature of their requirement for a blood transfusion; how many have developed AIDS; and how many have died.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Up to 31 December 1990, the total number of reports in the United Kingdom of recipients of blood transfusions infected with HIV is 135. This includes persons known to have been transfused in the United Kingdom, those transfused abroad and those where the place of transfusion is unknown.

The number known to have been transfused in the United Kingdom is 49. The number reported with AIDS is 28 of whom 20 are known to have died.

The information is not available centrally to categories the HIV-infected recipients by the nature of their requirement for blood transfusion.

Gulf Casualties

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which national health service hospitals that are earmarked to assist in the Gulf dispute to accept casualties have also been granted trust status from 1 April; and if he will make a statement as to those hospitals' financial basis for the financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities' plans for dealing with casualties from hostilities in the Gulf involve hospitals throughout the national health service. It is for health authorities to allocate cases to particular hospitals and information on which hospitals will be used is not available centrally.

The Government will provide extra money to meet the full costs of any Gulf casualties. We have told health authorities that they should spend what is necessary and we are giving guidance on how to account for and reclaim Gulf costs. This means that health authorities will be able to continue to use all the money in their normal allocations for their normal workload.

Neurological Disorders

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants made to voluntary organisations concerned with neurological disorders in 1990-91, 1989-90 and 1988-89.

Mr. Dorrell: Grants made to voluntary organisations concerned, at least in part, with people who suffer from neurological disorders, in so far as they can be identified, are shown in the table. Grants were awarded by the Department of Health either under section 64 of the Health Service and Public Health Act 1968 or through disbursement of retail prices index error funds.

Organisation	*Section 64 grants made*		*Section 64 grants approved for payment*	*RPI*[1]
	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1988-90* £
Action for Dysphasic Adults	—	—	16,580	10,000
Action for Research into Multiple Sclerosis	—	—	—	13,000
Alzheimers Disease Society	130,000	130,000	130,000	—
Association for All Speech Impaired Children	—	—	—	25,000
Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus	26,250	14,790	34,919	—
Association to Combat Huntingdon's Chorea	10,000	20,000	10,000	5,000
Bobath Centre	—	—	—	28,500
Brain Damage Research Trust	—	—	—	20,000
British Institute of Mental Handicap	35,000	35,000	35,000	—
British Paralympic Association	—	—	—	500,000
Campaign for Mentally Handicapped (now called Value into Action)	24,205	20,000	20,000	—
Chest Heart and Stroke Association	23,000	50,000	71,163	—
Downs Syndrome Association	—	15,000	15,000	—
Dystonia Society	—	—	6,920	—
Foundation for Conductive Education	—	24,200	45,579	30,000
Headway	40,000	40,000	40,000	—
Mencap	220,000	250,000	250,000	325,000
Menieres Society	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Migraine Trust	—	—	8,000	—
Motor Neurone Association	10,000	10,000	10,000	15,000
Muscular Dystrophy	—	—	—	70,000
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association	5,000	10,000	10,000	—
Neurofibromatosis Association (LINK)	—	5,000	5,000	—
Pain Relief Foundation	8,000	8,500	8,500	5,000
Parkinson's Disease Society	15,000	13,375	—	—
St. Elizabeth's Home	—	—	—	8,000
St. Katherine Housing Association Ltd.	—	—	18,000	3,000
SENSE	30,000	30,000	30,000	—
Spinal Injuries Association	25,000	25,000	—	—
Stars Organisation for Spastics	—	—	—	5,000
Tuberous Scelerosis Association	1,500	2,000	2,000	—

[1] The RPI fund was only available for these two years.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received from the chairman of Trent regional health authority its decision to endorse the application made by Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu Mexborough hospital to become a national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trent regional health authority formally supported the application made by Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu Mexborough hospital for trust status at its public meeting on 12 November 1990, and notified the Department of their decision on the same day.

Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the timetable for the third wave of national health service trust applications.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The timetable for third wave NHS trust applications will be broadly the same as for the second wave. On this basis, it would be as follows:

September 1991

All units will be invited to express an interest in applying for Trust status without commitment.

End April 1992

Potential Trusts complete and submit formal applications.

May-July 1992

Consultation by Regional Health Authorities on formal applications.

September 1992

Successful Trusts will be established, with the appointment of Trust Chairmen and non-executive directors.

October-March 1993

Trusts run in shadow form. Arrangements are made for transfer of assets and staff.

April 1993

Third wave NHS Trusts become operational.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation he proposes to take in order to evaluate the first wave of national health service trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At the local level district health authorities will be closely engaged with NHS trusts in negotiating contracts for services. Trusts will have at least one public meeting each year to discuss their annual report and accounts. Nationally, trusts will be accountable through their business plans and in-year financial monitoring.

Abortions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year for the last five years the number of abortions over 12 weeks' gestation performed on women under *(a)* 20 years, *(b)* 20 to 24 years, *(c)* 25 to 34 years and *(d)* over 34 years of age, resident in the Trent regional health authority area, and in each constituent district health authority thereof, respectively.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Births

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will list, for each of the past 10 years, the number of births by postal code of the residence of the mother of each of the following postal code areas *(a)* NN9, *(b)* NN14, *(c)* NN15, *(d)* NN16, *(e)* NN17, *(f)* NN18, *(g)* PE8 and *(h)* PE9.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives the number of live births in the post code sectors specified. These statistics are not available prior to 1982.

Year	*Post code sector*							
	NN9	*NN14*	*NN15*	*NN16*	*NN17*	*NN18*	*PE8*	*PE9*
1982	477	377	339	288	341	461	185	266
1983	426	351	332	277	339	480	185	308
1984	447	346	290	283	328	466	166	296
1985	459	374	342	287	362	504	194	294
1986	447	367	326	333	325	474	203	284
1987	474	392	380	353	361	480	194	283
1988	513	404	355	345	399	476	194	306
1989	507	425	361	368	383	489	196	284

Information Technology

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allowance has been made of the level of capital expenditure by local authorities on information technology for community care purposes in the assessment of central Government grants; and what was the estimate of total such expenditure on which this was assessed.

Mr. Dorrell: Supplementary credit approvals of £4·9 million are available in 1991-92 to help local authorities —LAs—meet the cost of purchasing software to assist them in the work which needs to be done effectively to develop, monitor and review the community care planning process.

The Government have issued to LAs annual capital guidelines—ACGs—of £85 million for 1990-91 and £98 million is available for 1991-92. Because ACGs are unhypothecated, LAs may use them for expenditure on information technology—IT—for the community care programme. These resources may be supplemented by other receipts available to LAs from the sale of capital assets and by revenue moneys. The amount of capital which any individual LA will need to spend on the IT needed to support the community care programme will depend on local circumstances.

Incontinence

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is funding, or planning to fund, into the problems facing people who suffer from incontinence and the advice available to them.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is currently funding a project which will draw together existing evidence on incontinence in six OPCS disability survey reports and relate this to previous United Kingdom research on incontinence and incontinence services. The project will also carry out additional analysis of the data on incontinence gathered during the surveys. A new project on the current and future roles of continence advisers is due to start in April 1991.

Family Health, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the practices covered by the Doncaster family health service authority have met the targets introduced in the general practitioners' new contract for *(a)* cervical cytology, *(b)* childhood immunisation and *(c)* boosters; how many minor surgery services they are anticipated to complete in the current year; how many children under five years have registered for child health surveillance with them; how many health promotion sessions they will have; and how many patients they are likely to see in them by the end of March.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is not available in the precise form requested. As at 30 September 1990, the proportion of GPs covered by Doncaster family health services authority —FHSA—who qualified for either a higher or lower target payment is as follows: *(a)* cervical cytology 100 per cent., *(b)* childhood immunisations 83 per cent. and *(c)* pre-school boosters 72 per cent. It is not yet possible to make forecasts of the likely levels of provision of particular services. As at 30 September, 390 payments had been made in respect of minor surgery sessions; 5,320 children were registered for child health surveillance services; and 966 payments in respect of health promotion clinics had been made.

Handynet System

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current use of the EEC's Handynet system.

Mr. Dorrell: The EC's computerised database of information for disabled people, known as Handynet, is not yet in operation. Preparation for the first module of Handynet, which is concerned with aids and equipment for disabled people and known as Handyaids, was completed in November 1990. The United Kingdom has nominated the Disabled Living Foundation as its co-ordination centre for Handyaids. The foundation will shortly be signing a contract with the EC Commission to enable it to enter its aids and equipment database into the Handyaids

system and to gain access to the data provided by co-ordination centres in other member states. It is anticipated that users will then be able to consult the database through the United Kingdom co-ordination centre by the summer of 1991.

Disabled People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has, using the World Health Organisation's classification, of the number of people with *(a)* impairments, *(b)* disabilities and *(c)* handicaps; and what he estimates the numbers to be in each category by the year 2000.

Mr. Dorrell: These concepts were used by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in its surveys of disability in Great Britain carried out between 1985 and 1988, the findings of which include the prevalence of disability among both adults and children. The results of the surveys were published in a series of six reports, which are available in the Library and are as listed. Assuming that the prevalence rate in each age group remains unchanged, we estimate that there will be a 9 per cent. increase in the total number of people with disabilities between 1985 and 2000, as a result of the changing age structure of the population. Actual figures will of course depend on a number of varying factors, including the advance of medical science.

"The Prevalence of Disability Among Adults"

"The Financial Circumstances of Disabled Adults Living in Private Households"

"The Prevalence of Disability Among Children"

"Disabled Adults: Services, Transport and Employment"

"The Financial Circumstances of Families with a Disabled Child Living in Private Households"

"Disabled Children: Service, Transport and Education"

HIV

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims for compensation have been received by his Department from those, other than haemophiliacs, with an HIV infection obtained from a national health service blood transfusion; and what has been the response to such claims.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are not aware that writs have been served on the Department of Health by individuals infected with HIV through national health service blood transfusions. Some writs have been served on health authorities.

North Devon Health Care Trust

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter dated 4 December 1990 and that of his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Hooper, dated 14 January 1991, both addressed to the hon. Member for Devon, North indicating the deferral of the application for establishing a North Devon health care trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Both letters will be placed in the Library. I will be making a statement shortly.

Women Doctors

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any proposals to improve the career opportunities of women doctors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to announce the publication today of the report of the joint working party on women doctors and their careers, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This proposes practical measures which can be taken to improve the career opportunities of women doctors.

The Government are providing £1·5 million for a number of initiatives—including new part-time training posts, increasing the fee for doctors on retainer scheme from £155 a year to £290 and supporting a new scheme designed to increase the number of women in surgical specialties.

Leukaemia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of bone marrow transplant units based in hospitals in England; and if he will make extra financial provision available to consultants in the units to fund the prescription of the drug Alpha Interferon to leukaemia patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. There are no plans to provide extra funding specifically to take account of the cost of prescribing Alpha Interferon to leukaemia patients. Hospitals are funded for the cost of drugs as part of their general allocation, and it is for them to determine locally how this should be spent.

North Devon Health Care Trust

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the sponsors of the proposed North Devon health care trust as at 1 December 1990, together with any subsequent changes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The sponsors of the Northern Devon health care trust as at 1 December 1990 were Mrs. R. Day, chairman of the North Devon health authority and Mr. E. Walker the project leader. Mr. Walker has now been replaced by Mrs. J. Acred as project leader.

Salmonella

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue strengthened anti-salmonella guidelines on the use of eggs and minced meat preparations in hospital catering establishments.

Mr. Dorrell: Existing guidance to the national health service including circular HC(86)14—a copy of which is available in the Library—on food hygiene and pest control and the national health service manual on hygiene sets out the principles of hygiene and good catering practice necessary for the prevention of food-borne illness.

We also issued a letter to all national health service district general managers in July 1988 asking them to ensure that all recipes containing raw eggs that are not likely to be cooked thoroughly should be amended to specify the use of pasteurised egg. It is a matter for local health authorities to ensure that the principles of this guidance are followed within catering establishments.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to reduce the risk of salmonella infection arising in hospitals and other mass catering establishments.

Mr. Dorrell: Existing guidelines to the national health service set out the principles necessary for the prevention of food-borne illness and provides specific advice on the proper handling of eggs. Advice to chief environmental health officers asks them to ensure that catering businesses are also aware of the need to replace raw egg with pasteurised egg in recipes in which eggs are served uncooked.

The Government have recently laid before Parliament the Food (Hygiene) General (Amendment) Regulations 1990 that require all food businesses to maintain safe temperatures of food.

It is a matter for the enforcement authorities to ensure that these procedures are followed in the whole of the catering industry.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Obscene Publications Squad

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to indicate, for each year from 1985 to date, how many operations have been conducted in each year concerning *(a)* material of a homosexual nature, *(b)* material of a heterosexual nature and *(c)* all materials.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information available does not distinguish between operations concerning material of a homosexual and heterosexual nature. The total number of operations conducted by the Metropolitan police obscene publications branch in each year covering all materials was:

	Number
1985	52
1986	46
1987	90
1988	101
1989	166
1990	142

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the overall cost of operations of the obscene publications squad in each year from 1985 to date and as to the number of officers assigned to the squad on a yearly average, for each of those years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information requested is as follows. The costs given relate to manpower and employment only.

	Cost April-March (£)	*Staff Police and Civilians*
1985-86	406,982	22
1986-87	440,522	22
1987-88	460,472	22
1988-89	513,063	22
1989-90	804,699	30
1990-91[1]	643,636	30

[1] 1 April to 31 December 1990.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to indicate which officer, and at what rank, is in overall command of the work of the obscene publications squad; and what policy exists as to the priority areas of operations of the squad.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the overall command of the obscene publications branch is undertaken by a detective chief superintendent. The priorities of the squad reflect force policy concerning the exploitation of vulnerable persons, especially children. In order of importance the priorities are:

(a) child pornography
(b) bizarre material
(c) extreme bondage and flagellation
(d) British publication of obscene material.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to indicate, for each year from 1985 to date *(a)* the number of charges brought as a result of operations by the obscene publications squad, *(b)* the number of prosecutions conducted and *(c)* the number of convictions obtained.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information requested is as follows:

(a) Number of charges brought as a result of operations by the obscene publications branch

	Number
1985	54
1986	108
1987	74
1988	65
1989	75
1990	112

(b) Number of prosecutions conducted and the number of convictions obtained

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*
1985	14	14
1986	15	20
1987	15	11
1988	17	15
1989	29	13
1990	27	26

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to list for each year from 1985 to date, the subject of each of the major operations conducted by the obscene publications squad, the duration of the operation, and the number of officers involved.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the subject of each of the

major operations conducted by the obscene publications branch was the seizure of either suspected obscene material or suspected indecent material relating to children. No records are kept of the duration of each operation or the number of officers involved.

Immigration

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to see there are adequate numbers of immigration officers at points of entry to the United Kingdom to avoid long delays at peak times; and what steps can be taken to examine passengers at ports of embarkation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Staffing of the immigration service, which is subject to public expenditure constraints, is kept under regular review. Flexible deployment of staff is aimed particularly at maintaining satisfactory clearance rates during peak periods. Delays are however inevitable when carriers or port operators, for their own commercial reasons, bring in large numbers of passengers within a very short period. Carriers and port operators are aware that it is open to them to request additional immigration service staff, provided that they meet the full cost. Such arrangements could include pre-clearance at the point of embarkation abroad.

Benjamin Wilson

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Benjamin Wilson was released following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights; and what monetary compensation is being considered.

Mr. John Patten: Mr. Wilson has not been released. His case will be referred to the local review committee at the prison where he is then detained in October this year as the first stage of a further review by the parole board.

The European Court of Human Rights upheld Mr. Wilson's claim of a breach of article 5 of the European convention on human rights in that he did not have recourse to a judicial body capable of determining the lawfulness of his detention and ordering his release if that detention was unlawful. However, the court also indicated, in rejecting his claim for damages, that there was no evidence that he would have regained his freedom had procedures consistent with the convention been available to him. We have no proposals to offer him compensation.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has any plans to extend the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on 25 October 1990 in respect of Benjamin Wilson, who was serving a discretionary life sentence, to people serving mandatory life sentences.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Deaths

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for deaths on public streets in *(a)* London, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Birmingham, *(d)* Liverpool and *(e)* England and Wales due to causes other than violence or road traffic accidents; and what are the figures for the same areas for deaths due to (i) hypothermia, (ii) malnutrition and (iii) physical neglect.

Mr. John Patten: The only available information is from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and is given in the table.

	Number of deaths registered in 1989 due to:		
	Malnutrition[1]	*Self-neglect*[2]	*Hypothermia*[3]
Greater London	12	3	69
Greater Manchester	—	—	12
Birmingham	2	1	12
Liverpool	2	—	4
ENGLAND AND WALES	83	13	375

[1] International classification 263.9.
[2] International classification 994.9/E904.0.
[3] Number of deaths with mention of hypothermia.

Prison Meals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by *(a)* region and *(b)* Her Majesty's prison establishment the average weekly cost of providing meals for inmates.

Mrs. Rumbold: In 1989-90, the latest figures available, the average weekly cost of providing meals for inmates was as follows:—

Table (a)

Region	*Cost* £
South-East	14·50
Midland	13·69
North	14·02
South-West	13·94

Table (b)

Establishment	*Cost* £
South-East Region	
Albany	16·20
Aldington	14·19
Ashford	25·83
Blantyre House	21·98
Blundeston	14·34
Brixton	10·46
Bullwood Hall	21·09
Camp Hill	12·90
Canterbury	12·68
Chelmsford	12·79
Coldingley	15·06
Cookham Wood	16·96
Dover	15·87
East Sutton Park	24·86
Feltham	17·06
Ford	16·74
Grendon and Spring Hill	18·19
Highpoint	13·52

Establishment	Cost £
Hollesley Bay	20·71
Holloway	12·80
Huntercombe and Finnamore Wood	16·76
Kingston (Portsmouth)	13·10
Latchmere House	19·67
Lewes	11·77
Littlehey	11·83
Maidstone	13·02
Mount	17·82
Northeye	15·89
Norwich	18·08
Parkhurst	16·94
Pentonville	12·43
Rochester	14·95
Send	22·75
Swaleside	12·56
Standford Hill	13·85
Wandsworth	9·17
Wayland	14·24
Downview	44·70
Wormwood Scrubs	14·85
Midland Region	
Ashwell	15·18
Aylesbury	16·88
Bedford	15·88
Birmingham	9·67
Brockhill	13·87
Featherstone	13·09
Gartree	19·01
Glen Parva	12·39
Hewell Grange	18·48
Leicester	14·15
Lincoln	11·84
Lowdham Grange	21·89
Morton Hall	16·71
North Sea Camp	18·26
Nottingham	14·27
Onley	14·79
Ranby	14·01
Shrewsbury	13·02
Stafford	11·66
Stocken	14·65
Sudbury	11·15
Swinfen Hall	18·96
Wellingborough	15·09
Whatton	16·43
North Region	
Acklington	13·89
Askham Grange	17·69
Buckley Hall	26·47
Castington	16·14
Deerbolt	13·33
Drake Hall	14·56
Durham	10·97
Garth	14·36
Everthorpe	13·74
Frankland	16·59
Full Sutton	13·75
Hatfield	17·25
Haverigg	12·75
Hindley	12·90
Hull	11·60
Kirkham	13·42
Kirklevington	39·47
Lancaster	13·53
Leeds	10·72
Lindholme	16·54
Liverpool	11·97
Low Newton	14·75
Manchester	12·00
New Hall	18·14
Northallerton	16·78
Preston	13·47
Risley	17·61
Rudgate	13·53
Stoke Heath	14·14
Styal	14·93
Thorn Cross	20·45
Thorp Arch	18·13
Wakefield	14·45
Werrington	22·02
Wetherbury	20·10
Wymott	13·85
South-West Region	
Bristol	12·52
Cardiff	12·74
Channings Wood	14·28
Dartmoor	12·35
Dorchester	15·35
Eastwood Park	21·35
Erlestoke	13·18
Exeter	14·32
Gloucester	12·12
Guys Marsh	19·85
Haslar	20·34
Leyhill	14·06
Long Martin	15·52
Oxford	16·23
Portland	12·61
Pucklechurch	11·35
Reading	10·99
Shepton Mallet	16·90
Swansea	13·86
Usk	20·52
The Verne	11·81
Winchester	11·63

West Midlands Police

Mrs. Maureeen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra police posts were authorised for West Midlands police between *(a)* 1974 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The West Midlands police was created in its present form in April 1974 following local government reorganisation. Between April 1974 and April 1979 the establishment of the West Midlands police was increased by 38. Since this Government took office in May 1979 the establishment of the force has increased by 384 and my right hon. Friend has recently approved a further 48 posts with effect from 1 October 1991.

Dangerous Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued to *(a)* fire and civil defence forces, *(b)* ambulance and *(c)* police forces regarding co-operation with other agencies in planning emergency liaison procedures in case of accident during the transportation of (i) radioactive waste, (ii) nuclear warloads and (iii) toxic waste.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Written guidance is issued to the police by the Association of Chief Police Officers, to the fire service by the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and to the ambulance service by the Regional Ambulance Officers Group. The guidance covers liaison and co-operation arrangements with other agencies likely to be involved in planning for and responding to a major incident as well as operational matters. The Home Office issues guidance, currently under review, to local authorities including fire and civil defence authorities.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present number of bail hostels in England and Wales as of 1 January; and what was the number on 1 January 1985, 1987 and 1989.

Mr. John Patten: The information sought is not readily available in the form requested, but is presented in the table as at 1 April for the years concerned, prior to 1991.

	Bail hostels	*Total probation/ Bail and Bail hostels*
1 April 1985	17	102
1 April 1987	16	102
1 April 1989	18	99
1 January 1991	23	105

The total number of places in probation/bail and bail hostels has increased from 1,340 on 1 April 1985 to 2,149 on 1 January 1991. The corresponding increase in places in bail only hostels has been from 246 to 421. There is an expansion programme to increase the number of bail places in these hostels by 1,100 between April 1988 and April 1994.

Offenders

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of organisations and individuals who submitted responses to *(a)* the White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", *(b)* the Green Paper "Supervision and Punishment in the Community" and *(c)* the consultation paper "Partnership in Dealing with Offenders in the Community"; and if he will place copies of the responses in the Library.

Mr. John Patten: There were more than 200 responses to the White Paper, "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", more than 160 to the Green Paper "Supervision and Punishment in the Community" and so far more than 100 to "Partnership in Dealing with Offenders in the Community". The organisations which submitted responses to each of the papers are listed in the table. We also received comments from probation services and probation committees; from magistrates' groups, benches and juvenile panels; from local authorities and social services departments; and from the police and prison services; and from a wide range of individuals, including judges and magistrates. It is for the respondents to decide whether to make their comments available more widely.

Organisations that submitted responses to "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public"

Action on Youth Crime
All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community
Apex Trust
Association of Black Probation Officers
Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP)
Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO)
Association of County Councils
Association for Juvenile Justice
Association of Members of Boards of Visitors
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Barnados
Basecamp
Berkshire Child Protection Committee
Board for Social Responsibility
British Association of Social Workers
The British Psychological Society
Calder Valley Conservative Association
Central Council of Probation Committees
The Children's Society
Commission for Racial Equality
Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association
The Co-ordinating Committee of Boards of Visitors
Council of Her Majesty's Circuit Judges
Criminal Bar Association
Dioceses of London and Southwark Prisons and Penal Concerns Group
Forum for Initiatives in Reparation and Mediation (FIRM)
Howard League for Penal Reform
Institute of Legal Executives
Intermediate Treatment Fund
JUSTICE
Justices' Clerks' Society
The Law Society
London Boroughs Children's Regional Planning Committee
The London Criminal Courts Solicitors' Association
The London Magistrates' Clerks' Association
The Magistrates' Association
The National Association of Asian Probation Staff
The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO)
NALGO (National and Local Government Officers Association)
The National Association of Probation Officers
The National Association of Senior Probation Officers (NASPO)
National Children's Home
The National Council of Women of Great Britain
The National Intermediate Treatment Federation
Newham Council
Parent to Parent Information on Adoption Services (PPIAS)
The Parole Board
Penal Affairs Consortium
The Police Federation
The Prison Reform Trust
Quaker Penal Affairs Committee
Release
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Save the Children
Securicor
Social Aid
Social Care Association
The Society of Black Lawyers
South Cumbria Alternative Sentencing Options Ltd.
Standing Conference on Drug Abuse
Townswomen's Guild
Victim Support

Organisations that submitted responses to "Supervision and Punishment in the Community"

Action on Youth Crime
Adullam Homes
Apex Trust
Assistant Chief Probation Officers Association
Association of Black Probation Officers
Association of Chief Officers of Probation
Association of Chief Officers of Probation (South West Branch)
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of County Councils
Association of Directors of Social Services
Association of District Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Bristol University
British Association of Social Workers
The British Psychological Society
Central Council of Probation Committees
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
Centre for Applied Social Studies
Commission for Racial Equality
Criminal Bar Association
The Howard League
Intermediate Treatment Fund
Lancaster University
Margery Fry Memorial Trust
National Association of Asian Probation Staff
National Association of Local Government Officers

National Association of Probation Officers
National Association of Probation Officers (Middlesex Branch)
National Association of Senior Probation Officers
National Probation Research and Information Exchange
Nottingham Black Initiative
Prison Reform Trust
Probation Service Assistants Action Group
Probation Service Christian Fellowship
Resettlement of Offenders Co-ordinating Committee
Save The Children
Social Aid
Social Science Research Company
Society of County Secretaries
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Standing Conference of CQSW Courses with Probation Options
Trades Union Council
Training Agency
Voluntary Managing Committee of Elliot House

Organisations that have so far submitted responses to "Partnership in Dealing with Offenders in the Community"

Action on Youth Crime
Apex Trust
Association of Black Probation Officers
Association of Chief Officers of Probation
Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Automated Security (Holdings) plc
Barnados
Barnsley District Council for Voluntary Service
Barnsley Magistrates' Court Probation Liaison Committee
Bridgebuilders—Association of Education and Guidance of Offenders
Central Council of Probation Committees
Colloquia
Community Development Foundation
Council of Europe
Cowen Mrs. P. Consultant c/o Mates, Training, Design and Development
CSV
Domestic Violence Intervention Project
Durham Training and Enterprise
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
Institute for the Study of Drug Dependency
Institute of Psychiatry
J. Paul Getty Jr. Charitable Trust
Leicester Night Shelter Project
Midland Groupwork Training
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
National Association of Civil Court Welfare Officers
National Association of Local Government Officers
National Association of Probation Officers
National Children's Home
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Intermediate Treatment Federation
National Youth Bureau
Norcare
North West London Housing Association Ltd
North West Thames Regional Health Authority
Prison Reform Trust
Rainer Foundation
Release
Resettlement of Offenders Co-ordinating Committee (Hampshire)
Royal College of Physicians
Save the Children Fund
Securicor
Society of County Secretaries
Standing Conference on Drug Abuse
The British Psychological Society
The Children's Society
The Magistrates' Association
The Richmond Fellowship for Community Mental Health
Timble Housing Project
Training Agency
Turning Point
Voluntary Action (Leeds)
Welsh Association of Residential Providers
Westend Co-ordinated Voluntary Services for Homeless Single People
West London Mission
West Yorkshire Forum for Offender Accommodation

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the Home Office. Estimates are, however, made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold—currently £250. However, following an interdepartmental exercise in 1972 an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs such as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Forensic Science

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consideration he is giving to the difficulties encountered by forensic scientists in presenting evidence in an adversarial system of justice;

(2) what consideration is being given to the introduction of an inquisitorial system of presentation of evidence in relation to forensic scientists giving evidence in court.

Mr. John Patten: Sir John May has indicated, in the course of his inquiry into the Guildford and Woolwich convictions, that he would propose to consider various aspects of forensic scientific evidence, including its obtaining, preparation and presentation, and the roles of expert witnesses, the Crown prosecution service and the court.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he is having with Cellmark Diagnostics about the centralisation of forensic laboratories in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No discussions are taking place with Cellmark Diagnostics on this issue.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of work at the Metropolitan police laboratory on chemiluminescent probes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that the laboratory is conducting trials in the use of chemi-luminescent probes. It will be for the director of the laboratory to decide on their future use in the light of those trials.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions exist on the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory's freedom to hold membranes from DNA analysis and body tissues, in particular *(a)* of suspects and *(b)* of persons found not guilty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no restrictions on holding evidence obtained from suspects in cases which have not yet come to trial. Section 64 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 requires the destruction of body tissues obtained from persons found not guilty.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Europe exchange of DNA profile standards scheme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: An informal agreement has been reached between a number of European DNA laboratories on the basic elements of the DNA profiling technique so that, in principle, the results obtained in these laboratories can be compared. A collaborative exercise has confirmed that there is a high level of compatibility. Future work will build on this progress, placing particular emphasis on quality assurance procedures.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance he gives to police forces in respect of the use of a DNA database in relation to *(a)* previous cases unsolved, *(b)* open cases, *(c)* unidentified remains and *(d)* missing persons;

(2) whether the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory sees any difficulty in extending its computer-based DNA database for national usage; and whether there are any plans for doing so.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The forensic science service is discussing with the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory the scientific and technical aspects of exchanging DNA data. We are also assessing the practical, legal and ethical questions raised by proposals for a national DNA database. Guidance has not yet been issued to the police, pending resolution of these issues.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of the future development of forensic science work among police forces in relation to the degree of fragmentation of such work between different police forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Work is well advanced to transform the forensic science service into an executive agency so that it can serve all provincial police forces in England and Wales more efficiently and effectively. The Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory will continue to serve the Metropolitan police and the City of London police.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with laboratory managers outside the Home Office forensic science services about the future of the forensic science service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Consultation on such issues takes place at a liaison group of directors of public sector forensic science laboratories in the United Kingdom. Meetings also take place at the working level.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the retention of DNA records of those found not guilty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is at present no statutory requirement for records of samples taken from a person in connection with the investigation of an offence to be destroyed when he is cleared of that offence. My right hon. Friend is considering whether there should be such a requirement in future as part of the wider debate about a national DNA database.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he is giving to the commercial arrangements made by police forces in relation to DNA testing with the laboratories at Aldermaston and Huntingdon.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These laboratories form part of the forensic science service. Discussions are in hand with police forces on the detailed arrangements for the introduction of direct charging for DNA tests and other work. Police forces may obtain DNA tests elsewhere if they wish.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make arrangements for defence counsel *(a)* for forensic work relating to London to be undertaken by laboratories outside London and *(b)* for the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory to make its services available to the defence in cases not relating to London;

(2) what is his policy in making the services of the Metropolitan police laboratory *(a)* available to litigants and others concerned with dog paternity cases and *(b)* in relation to other commercial work.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As part of its preparation for agency status, the forensic science service is reviewing its policy on defence work. I understand that the Metropolitan police is also conducting a review of the future of its forensic laboratory and the work which it undertakes. No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column *245*, on the numbers of forensic scientists available for police work; whether the answer includes forensic scientists outside the Home Office forensic science service; *(a)* in Government service, *(b)* in local authority service and *(c)* in the private sector.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The figure of 527 provided in the answer of 23 November 1990 was in respect of the Home Office forensic science service. In addition, the Metropolitan police laboratory has 231 scientific and technical staff in post who, directly or indirectly, provide scientific support to the police. No information is held centrally on the numbers of scientists employed by local authorities or in the private sector who could provide a similar service.

BBC

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the timetable for the renewal of the BBC's charter.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The present BBC charter expires at the end of 1996. We have not yet set a timetable for the review which will be necessary before it expires.

Local Government

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a table of expenditure under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for 1989-90, broken down into the educational, economic, social and other appropriate categories and cross tabulated by standard regions, with Greater London shown as a separate region.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold: I regret that under present arrangements the information requested is not available.

For information in relation to local authority expenditure under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 within each local authority area I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the question from the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 23 October 1990 at columns *126-28* and to his own question of 13 November 1990 at column *87*.

Zebra Crossings

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many on-the-spot fines have been levied on errant motorists in respect of traffic offences on zebra crossings since the provision came into operation.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

The information collected centrally does not separately identify fixed penalty notices issued for offences at zebra crossings.

DEFENCE

Regimental System

15. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the regimental system in the light of future cuts in the size of the British Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As I said during the defence debate last June, the Government believe in the regimental system and are convinced that it must be maintained for the esprit de corps that it brings to our front-line battalions. Regiments may have to be disbanded or amalgamated, but the regimental system will go on.

Personnel Deployment

16. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many services personnel, excluding MOD civilians, are currently deployed in the Mediterranean, near east and Gulf areas.

Mr. Tom King: At the outbreak of hostilities the United Kingdom had some 35,000 service personnel in the Gulf area. Approximately a further 7,500 are deployed in the Mediterranean and near east.

Careers Information and Recruitment

17. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest figure for the number of armed services careers information and recruitment centres.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 290 service careers information offices located throughout the United Kingdom.

Devonport Dockyard

18. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the existing work load at Devonport dockyard with specific reference to both the core programme and unallocated work subject to tendering.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: DML is currently working on three fleet submarines, three frigates and one Royal Fleet Auxiliary, RFA Fort Austin, which was transferred to Devonport's core programme from the unallocated programme. The balance between the core and unallocated programmes is kept under review to ensure we obtain value for money.

Gulf Crisis

19. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to pay a further visit to the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: I have no present plans to do so.

21. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of British military and civilian personnel now stationed in the Gulf; and what information he has on the total for all members of the European Community.

22. **Mr. Aitken:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the latest military situation in the Gulf.

27. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the military situation in the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friends to the answer I gave today to the Members for Pontyprydd (Dr. Howells) and for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and to my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

25. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any body bags have been sent to the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: We have made the necessary provision for casualties arising during the course of military operations in the Gulf.

28. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of operational efficiency of the Challenger tanks serving with the 1st Armoured Division in the Saudi desert.

Mr. Allan Clark: We are satisfied with the level of operational efficiency of the Challenger tanks deployed to the Gulf.

Nuclear Weapons

20. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy on the retention of land-based short-range nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government fully support NATO's policy, as set out in last year's London declaration. Though reaffirming the need to maintain

up-to-date nuclear weapons in Europe for the foreseeable future, the alliance acknowledged that there would be a significantly reduced role for sub-strategic weapons of the shortest range. Once negotiations begin on short-range nuclear forces, the alliance will propose, in return for reciprocal action by the Soviet Union, the elimination of all its nuclear artillery shells from Europe.

SSN20

23. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to introduce the SSN20 into service within the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend announced on 25 July that we intend to maintain around 12 nuclear-powered submarines in service. Following the completion of feasibility studies for SSN20, we are considering the procurement plans needed to sustain this force level in the longer term.

Belize

24. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the numbers and responsibilities of British service men and women in Belize.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the eighth report of the Select Commmittee on Defence—HC 624, Session 1987-88—on British forces in Belize. The strength of the garrison remains around 1,550 and there are 10 loan service personnel currently serving with the Belize defence force.

RAF Sculthorpe

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received in respect of RAF Sculthorpe, Norfolk.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: One representation has been received from a member of the public. No decisions have been taken as to the future use of the base.

Defence Strategy

29. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his United States counterpart to discuss defence strategy arising from changes in east-west relationships.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met Mr. Cheney at the NATO defence planning committee ministerial session held in Brussels on 6 and 7 December 1990. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Library.

Operation Granby

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Belgian Government's refusal of permission for the supply of ammunition on a procurement order from his Department for use by British forces in Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our initial request for additional ammunition was met in full by the United States, Germany and the Netherlands. We did not, therefore, need any ammunition from Belgium, which has provided assistance in a number of other ways. We are grateful to our allies for meeting our needs at such short notice.

"Dispatches"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department afforded any assistance to the producers of the "Dispatches" programme on British nuclear weapons tests broadcast on 16 January; and if he will obtain a copy of the programme for his departmental library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The producers of the "Dispatches" programme were given a detailed background briefing by officials, and an attributable statement for use in the programme. There are no plans to obtain a copy of the programme for the departmental library.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce the changes concerning the naval estate and support services following on "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 12 December 1990 at column *430*.

"The Sandy Times"

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any decision has yet been taken to provide funding for "The Sandy Times", which circulates among United Kingdom forces in The Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Costs will be met by the Ministry of Defence.

Defence Quality Assurance

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to reach a decision about the proposed move of the Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance from Woolwich to Teeside.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As my right hon. Friend made clear in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South on 4 December, the issues being addressed by my Department are now wider in scope than the affordability of the Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance move as planned. We will come to a decision as soon as possible.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the total cost of moving the Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance to Teesside as compared to constructing a new headquarters building at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department is currently re-examining the range of facilities that the Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance will require in the long term to support the armed services, and is re-estimating the construction costs that need to be incurred. Indications to date are that the cost of retaining existing London sites and undertaking necessary reconstruction on them would be considerably more than the cost of constructing facilities outside London.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* the design and

preparation for a new Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance headquarters building at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich and *(b)* the proposed move to a new headquarters on Teesside.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the responses given to him by my predecessor on 20 April 1988, *Official Report*, columns *501-2*, and 12 April 1989, *Official Report*, columns *515-17*. Sketch plans for a headquarters building at the Royal Arsenal west, Woolwich for the Quality Assurance Directorate were completed in 1983 at a cost to the Property Services Agency of £300,000. The identified costs of studies on other buildings amounted to £120,000. The departmental costs of the staff carrying out feasibility studies and investment appraisals on the future location of the Directorate General, Defence Quality Assurance were incurred in the normal course of their work and have not been separately identified.

Expenditure on the proposed move to new headquarters and technical facilities on Teesside currently totals around £4·3 million.

Royal Arsenal, Woolwich

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the repair, maintenance and refurbishment of buildings at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich over each of the most recent 10 years for which figures are available together with the estimated expenditure for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The details of expenditure requested are as follows:

	Repair and maintenance (£ thousands)	*Refurbishment (£ thousands)*
1980-81	1,083	277
1981-82	1,212	300
1982-83	1,552	357
1983-84	1,802	471
1984-85	2,272	715
1985-86	1,785	1,593
1986-87	1,846	1,584
1987-88	1,749	2,427
1988-89	1,514	662
1989-90	1,629	642
1990-91[1]	1,550	500
1991-92[1]	1,450	300

[1] Estimated.

The refurbishments from 1985-86 include expenditure needed to house DGDQA units moved from Harefield, Middlesex and Garland Road, Plumstead.

Black Officers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the highest rank in each of the services held by a black officer; and what the current numbers of black officers are in each service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No records are kept of the ethnic origins of serving personnel by rank or otherwise. I am, therefore, unable to provide the information requested.

Civilian Employees

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are employed by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Alan Clark: The number of United Kingdom-based civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence on 1 January 1991 was 139,917.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 23 January 1991

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

London House

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, under what terms the Commissioners hold 8 Barton street, London house; who else has a legal interest in the property; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners own the freehold of London house, 8 Barton street, and there are no other legal interests in the property.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Record Office

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Attorney-General whether the report of the efficiency scrutiny of the Public Record Office has been completed and when it is expected to be published.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has received the report of the efficiency scrutiny of the Public Record Office. The report is being published today and copies placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The scrutiny was set up in August 1990 to look at the functions, management and organisation of the Public Record Office, to examine the services it provides and to make proposals on its future status. The Lord Chancellor is most concerned to ensure that the priceless national asset of the records held by the Public Record Office is maintained efficiently and that the best possible quality of service is provided to those who wish to use them.

The scrutiny team has produced a wide-ranging report and the Lord Chancellor will be considering the detailed recommendations that it contains. He accepts the broad thrust of the report and agrees with the scrutiny team's conclusion that the Public Record Office should become an executive agency under the Government's "next steps" programme. Officials of the Public Record Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department will be drawing up an action plan for the transition to agency status and associated management changes.

TRANSPORT

Shipping Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what records are kept by his Department of the number of shipping accidents there have been in the coastal waters of the United Kingdom, involving *(a)* collisions, *(b)* groundings and *(c)* sinkings; how far the records go back; and what is the date of the latest records available.

Mr. McLoughlin: The records kept show the numbers of collisions and groundings for each year for United Kingdom merchant vessels over 100 gross tons and United Kingdom fishing vessels, on a worldwide basis, back to 1972. They also show individual merchant and fishing vessels lost from any cause in each year.

The information for the years 1972-88 is available in the Department's publication "Casualties to Vessels and Accidents to Men". This publication was discontinued with the setting up of the marine accident investigation branch (MAIB) in July 1989. For 1989—the latest year for which figures are currently available—the information is contained in the MAIB publication "Review for 1989".

The figures for the past 10 years are as follows:

Year	*Collisions and contacts*	*Strandings and Groundings*	*Losses (all causes)*
Merchant vessels			
1980	153	49	8
1981	125	45	11
1982	154	44	4
1983	107	25	5
1984	91	35	5
1985	69	28	6
1986	55	21	4
1987	46	16	5
1988	56	22	6
1989	62	28	3
Fishing vessels			
1980	23	26	39
1981	20	25	52
1982	38	29	50
1983	26	33	42
1984	15	36	41
1985	22	32	40
1986	21	33	19
1987	13	40	14
1988	19	55	22
1989	46	51	22

Oil Tankers

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the environmental risks associated with oil tankers using the route through the Minches, as opposed to the recommended deep water route west of the Western Isles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) on 14 November, columns *139-40*.

Since the deep water route was implemented in October 1987 I have received a number of representations from hon. Members, environmental organisations and members of the public, all expressing concern about the use of the Minches by oil tankers.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the annual figures for the number of laden oil tankers which sailed through the deep water route west of the Western Isles in a southerly direction for each of the past 10 years and the amount of oil carried;

(2) what are the annual figures for the number of laden oil tankers which sailed through the Minches in a southerly direction for each of the past 10 years and the amount of oil carried.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is not available.

My Department commissioned a survey of southbound traffic in the two routes in September and October 1989. The survey ran for 21 days and nights, excluding three interruptions by bad weather which forced the survey vessels to seek shelter for a total of six days. During the survey period a total of 25 laden oil tankers, 16 of which were over 10,000 grt, proceeded south through the Minches compared with four laden tankers, all over 10,000 grt, which proceeded south through the deep water route. Sea conditions were such as to render use of the deep water route an impractical alternative in the opinion of many of the masters involved.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he intends that cost-benefit analysis should be used in considering any proposals from ScotRail to electrify the Edinburgh-Glasgow, via Falkirk, and the Edinburgh-Dunblane-Glasgow railway lines; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what assurances have been given that the social benefits of electrification will be taken into account in considering proposals to electrify the Edinburgh-Glasgow, via Falkirk, and Edinburgh-Dunblane-Glasgow railway lines;

(3) what criteria will be used to assess any proposals to electrify the railway line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), the then Secretary of State, set out the criteria for rail investment in his letter of 19 December 1989 to the then chairman of the British Railways Board, which set the board's objectives for the period 1990-91 to 1992-93. I am sending a copy to the hon. Member.

Speedlink

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total value of moneys paid out under section 8 of the Transport Act 1974 to assist in the provision of Speedlink rail freight services.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1975 grants of £69 million (cash) have been awarded under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974. Around £10 million assisted the provision of rail facilities serviced by the Speedlink network representing less than 10 per cent. of the total grant-aided traffic. These figures include a number of schemes no longer subject to the conditions of grant which normally apply for 10 years and others which have ceased operation at some time during the period.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport monitors energy consumption and undertakes detailed energy efficiency surveys in its major buildings. These activities have, for example, produced improvements in air conditioning plant and have led to the introduction of new building management systems and to the installation of new lighting systems. New opportunities continue to be sought and implemented.

In 1989-90, the last full year for which data are available, the energy bill of the Department was reduced by about £120,000, 5 per cent. compared with the previous year.

Red Routes

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column 606, if he will outline the programme of monitoring for the pilot red route scheme being undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the effects so far of the routes' introduction.

Mr. Chope: Monitoring will cover safety, public transport performance, vehicle flow counts, parking surveys, shopping activity, pedestrian movement, journey times, enforcement data, loading activity and the use of rat runs.

Present indications are that traffic, including buses, is flowing more freely and that there is less illegal parking, but it is too soon to reach firm conclusions.

WALES

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what expenditure has been incurred by his Department in ensuring slaughterhouses in Wales meet EC standards.

Mr. David Hunt: No special financial assistance is provided by my Department to ensure slaughterhouses in Wales meet EC standards. The Department's veterinary staff are available to provide advice on these standards.

Green Belts

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to the establishment of green belts in Wales and in Cardiff, North in particular.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This matter is being considered as part of the current exercise to review the Department's existing strategic planning guidance. The Assembly of Welsh Counties has accepted the invitation to take forward that review in consultation with the Council of Welsh Districts and other interested bodies. To launch the debate on green belts, my right hon. Friend has convened and will address a conference at the Welsh Office on 28 January 1991.

Council for the Protection of Rural Wales

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to the report of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales entitled "How Green Was My Valley"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has read the report with interest. Some of its central concerns will be considered at the green belts conference in the Welsh Office, on 28 January 1991, when the CPRW will present a paper.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many job vacancies there are for *(a)* machine operators, *(b)* catering staff, *(c)* sales distribution staff, *(d)* cleaning staff and *(e)* clerical employees in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total vacancies unfilled—October 1990 (latest)

Vacancy	*Number*
Machine Operator (Engineering)—skilled	60
Machine Operator (Engineering)—unskilled	6
Catering	1,907
Selling—Distribution	1,312
Cleaning and Personal Services	1,944
Clerical and Machine Operators	1,367

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), on 14 January, *Official Report*, column *433*, if he will now set out his proposed timetable for *(a)* the submission of the application for Pembrokeshire district health authority to become a trust, *(b)* the consultation process on the application and *(c)* his decision on the application.

Mr. David Hunt: If Pembrokeshire district health authority decides to submit a formal application it will be subject to a statutory consultation period of three months after which I would hope to issue an early decision.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the amount of money spent in Wales during 1990 on the set-aside scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of £231,137 was paid out in Wales during 1990.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the number of people admitted as visitors and the number of people refused entry and returned abroad by the immigration authorities at United Kingdom ports of entry for each month in 1990 who were nationals of *(a)* Jamaica, *(b)* Barbados, *(c)* Trinidad and Tobago and *(d)* Guyana.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is given in the table.

Total visitors admitted to, and total passengers refused leave to enter and removed from, the United Kingdom for selected nationalities, 1990

Nationality	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*
Jamaica										
Total visitors admitted[1]	600	800	1,000	1,200	1,500	2,300	3,100	2,300	1,600	1,400
Total passengers refused leave to enter and removed	50	52	58	42	48	50	52	36	47	60
Barbados										
Total visitors admitted[1]	100	100	200	300	400	800	1,000	900	600	300
Total passengers refused leave to enter and removed	2	1	3	3	4	3	2	3	3	5
Trinidad and Tobago										
Total visitors admitted[1]	300	300	500	600	700	1,300	1,700	1,200	1,000	800
Total passengers refused leave to enter and removed	11	11	10	9	11	11	10	10	17	13
Guyana										
Total visitors admitted[1]	100	200	200	200	200	400	700	500	400	200
Total passengers refused leave to enter and removed	6	3	6	3	4	4	5	1	2	10

[1] Provisional figures for ordinary and business visitors.

Election Returning Officers

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether for the 1987 general election any chief executive of a local authority *(a)* refused appointment as an acting returning officer or *(b)* took unpaid leave from their authority in order to carry out the function of an acting returning officer.

Mrs. Rumbold: Chief executives of local authorities in England and Wales who are acting retuning officers are not directly appointed to that office: they have a statutory responsibility to carry out the duties of acting returning officers by virtue of the fact that they are electoral registration officers appointed by a district or London borough council. We are not aware of any chief executive who took unpaid leave in order to carry out the duties of acting returning officer at the last general election.

Prison Visits

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are limited to closed visits.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not recorded centrally and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there is any provision within the prison system for unsupervised visits to take place.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under standing order 5, a copy of which is in the Library, there is no provision within the prison system for any visits to take place out of the sight of prison staff.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) at which prison department establishments visits are normally restricted to 30 minutes' duration;

(2) which prison department establishments allow only one visit every four weeks.

Mrs. Rumbold: Convicted prisoners are normally able to receive at least two visits every four weeks, and sometimes more, at all establishments except Brixton, Durham, Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Shrewsbury and Swansea.

Visits normally last at least one hour, and frequently longer, at all establishments except Durham, Leeds, Liverpool and Wandsworth.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the annual expenditure on assisted visits each year since 1986-87; and what is the estimated annual expenditure in 1990-91.

Mrs. Rumbold: The annual expenditure on the payment of claims made under the assisted prison visits scheme in the past four years has been as follows:

	£
1986-87	905,628
1987-88	793,407
1988-89	1,332,598
1989-90	1,491,204

The scheme is not cash limited and all valid claims are met in full. It is therefore possible to estimate only annual expenditure in 1990-91. It appears likely that end-of-year expenditure will be around £1,650,000.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what special circumstances can prisoners be denied open visits.

Mrs. Rumbold: Standing order 5, a copy of which is in the Library, stipulates that visits to prisoners should take place in open visiting rooms unless security or control considerations require that a special or closed visiting room or a closed visiting box should be used. This may be considered necessary in individual cases in order to prevent, for example, the smuggling of drugs.

Wormwood Scrubs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the amount of money spent on A wing of Wormwood Scrubs prison, London, over the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of £811,000 has been spent on building work in A hall at Wormwood Scrubs prison over the last five years.

Prisoners' Letters

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to stop the censorship of prisoners' letters in prisons in England and Wales, except where prisoner security is necessary; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: In 1986, routine censorship of prisoners' correspondence in category D prison establishments was abolished. Since 1988 only a random 5 per cent. sample of incoming and outgoing letters are routinely read in category C and equivalent female and young offender establishments. During 1990, a trial took place to test the reduction of censorship to a 5 per cent. sample in selected category B—non-dispersal—establishments. We are currently studying the results of that trial.

Warwickshire Police

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to meet the chief constable of Warwickshire to discuss the standard spending assessment for the police service in Warwickshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were in categories A, B, C and D, respectively, on the most recent available date.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest information readily available centrally is given in the table.

Population[1] of adult male sentenced prisoners in local and training prisons in England and Wales on 30 September 1990: by security category of prisoner

	Number
A[2]	431
B	5,240
C	13,866
D	5,135
Not recorded	3,064
Total population	27,736

[1] The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

[2] Including prisoners provisionally placed in Category A.

Fire Service, Warwickshire

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the chief fire officer of Warwickshire to discuss the standard spending assessment for the county's fire service.

Mr. John Patten: Representatives of Warwickshire county council have had a number of opportunities to discuss their standard spending assessments with Ministers at the Department of the Environment. We will consider carefully any request from the Warwickshire fire authority for a meeting to discuss standards of fire cover. The chief fire officer met Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services on 17 December to discuss those standards.

Missing Persons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the South Yorkshire police force area how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults are known to have gone missing for each of the last five years he has records; and how many were subsequently traced.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following annual figures are given in relation to the total number of missing persons reports received in the South Yorkshire police force area for the years 1986-1990. Children and adults are not categorised separately, nor do the figures take account of those individuals who regularly leave their homes and may be

reported missing several times a year. Separate records are maintained of children and adults who are still missing at the end of each year.

Year	Total number of missing persons reports	Outstanding at end of year	
		Children	Adults
1986	3,990	16	4
1987	3,908	32	5
1988	3,420	13	4
1989	4,281	14	3
1990	4,740	27	7

Home Security

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many elderly people have so far benefited from the provision of home security and alarm systems under the safer cities and other projects *(a)* in London and *(b)* in the London borough of Wandsworth.

Mr. John Patten: Four safer cities projects are based in London: at Islington, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth. Twenty-two safer cities grants, worth £209,000, have been approved for agencies and organisations in those areas so that they can provide better home security or alarm systems to elderly people. The estimated number of beneficiaries is 3,500 elderly people, including 400 in the London borough of Wandsworth.

Iraqi Nationals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders are in force against Iraqi nationals; and how many are held in custody at present.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August, notices of intention to make deportation orders have been served on 128 Iraqi nationals. Deportation orders have been made against three of these Iraqi nationals. As of 22 January 1991, a total of 61 Iraqi nationals are detained pending their appearance before the advisory panel established under paragraph 157 of the immigration rules—HC 251—or consideration of other representations. Two further Iraqi nationals, who are military officers, are being detained as prisoners of war.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi nationals are currently in the United Kingdom by virtue of *(a)* permanent residence, *(b)* student, *(c)* exceptional leave to remain and *(d)* asylum application.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The revised estimate from the latest labour force surveys and immigration control data is that some 7,000 Iraqis are usually resident in the United Kingdom, including students. In addition, some 1,300 Iraqis have been granted exceptional leave to remain and around 1,600 have applications outstanding for asylum.

Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of children admitted into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years, for the purpose of adoption, without the necessary entry clearance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available. Statistics collected on passenger admissions do not separately identify children who come to the United Kingdom for adoption.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Housing

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of subsidies to council housing as a percentage of gross domestic product in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Yeo: Housing and rent rebate subsidies from Government and rate fund contributions from local authorities to council housing in Great Britain between 1990-91 and 1989-90 are:

Year	£ billion	GDP Per cent.
1980-81	2·5	1·0
1981-82	2·1	0·8
1982-83	2·1	0·7
1983-84	2·8	0·9
1984-85	3·1	0·9
1985-86	3·2	0·9
1986-87	3·4	0·9
1987-88	3·5	0·8
1988-89	3·4	0·7
1989-90	3·8	0·7

Local Government Finance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority the percentage of uncollected *(a)* community charge and *(b)* uniform business rates outstanding for the latest date for which he has figures.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 7 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *220*, if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter of 19 December 1990 to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside.

Mr. Portillo: The information contained in my letter of 19 December 1990 is now out of date. The latest position with regulations on local government finance still to be made is as follows:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

Statutory Instruments (all subject to the negative resolution procedure) to be laid by 31 March 1991.

The Community Charge

1. Introduction of community charge reduction scheme.
2. Form of the community charge bill and content of rate demand notice for 1991-92.
3. Content of community charge bill and of rate demand notice for the City of London for 1991-92.
4. Miscellaneous administrative matters—billing on change of address, attachment of earnings orders, costs of summonses, notification of entry.
5. Revised rules for calculation of relevant population.
6. Amendment to increase the amounts of financial loss and travel and subsistence allowance payable to VCCT members.

Rating

1. Miscellaneous amendments to the Collection and Enforcement (Local Lists) Regulations.
2. Miscellaneous amendments to the Collection and Enforcement (Central Lists) Regulations.
3. Amendments of the domestic/non-domestic boundary in respect of bed-and-breakfast accommodation.
4. Valuation of non-domestic property in former enterprise zones.
5. City of London minimum and maximum rating multipliers for 1991-92.
6. Amendments to regulations on valuation of caravan sites consequent on Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill.
7. Amendment of regulations on payment of interest to provide for cases where successive payments are made in respect of the same period.
8. Closedown of precept and rate rules under old rating system.
9. Further consequential amendments and repeals.
10. Regulations on definition of hereditament used for electricity generation.

Capital Finance

1. Regulations to set rate of discount used in calculating the cost of credit arrangements.
2. Miscellaneous amendments to the capital finance regulations.
3. Regulations to apply the new system, with modifications, to the Lea Vally regional park authority.
4. Regulations to enable local authorities to issue sterling commercial paper and medium-term notes.
5. Regulations to apply to new system to parish and community councils.
6. Miscellaneous amendments to the list of approved investments.
7. Regulations to apply part VII of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to the City of London and the South Yorkshire and London pension authorities.
8. Consequential amendments and repeals.

Order subject to positive resolution to be laid by 31 March 1991.

Rating

1. Technical amendments to Electricity Supply Industry (Rateable Values) Order 1989 and Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) Order 1989.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the Doncaster local authority area *(a)* the number of individuals who are liable to pay the personal community charge, *(b)* the number of people who are liable to pay the standard community charge and *(c)* the number of premises liable for the uniform business rate.

Mr. Key: The information reported by the local authority is as follows.

(a) By 31 December 1990, a total of 224,102 people were liable to make a payment in respect of a personal community charge.

(b) There were 3,232 properties liable to a standard community charge on 1 June 1990, excluding those with a multiplier of zero.

No information is available on the number of premises liable for the uniform business rate. There were 7,086 hereditaments on the authority's rating list on 31 December 1990.

Care in the Community

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the programme he intends to follow in providing additional finances to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* voluntary bodies, in each of the four district areas in south Yorkshire, in (i) the present financial year, (ii) the 1991-92 financial year and (iii) subsequent financial years in order to ensure adequate availability of appropriate housing to match the requirements of his Department's programme for the implementation of care in the community.

Mr. Yeo: We hope to make an announcement shortly about the regional distribution of the Housing Corporation's 1991-92 approved development programme. The distribution of resources within its regions is a matter for the corporation.

Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield all receive allocations of urban programme resources before the start of each financial year for expenditure on projects targeting deprived inner-city areas and disadvantaged minorities in them. Mainstream housing provision is not an appropriate objective of the urban programme, although expenditure on support for housing workers in the voluntary sector and hostel bed spaces may be.

Any additional burden on services which are supported through revenue support grant will be reflected in future standard spending assessments. This support is unlikely to be hypothecated.

Any additional demands for housing resulting from the implementation of care in the community will be taken into account in future public expenditure surveys and in the distribution of resources for housing capital expenditure to individual local authorities. No account has been taken for 1990-91 or 1991-92.

Warwickshire County Council

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what calculations underlay his assessment that Warwickshire county council would earn interest of £6·7 million, as set out in the standard spending assessment calculation for 1991.

Mr. Portillo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) yesterday.

Property Services Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether persons refused severance allowances by the Property Services Agency in accordance with circular SWOP3/91 will still have the same conditions of service entitlement should they later be made redundant by the successor employer, a Government-owned company.

Mr. Yeo: The Government are committed to ensuring that any staff who are transferred out of the civil service either into a Government-owned company—GOCO—or into a privately owned company will enjoy as far as possible redundancy compensation provisions identical to those they have at present.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether persons refused severance payment by the Property Services Agency under the terms of circular SWOP3/91 will be given an explanation for such refusals.

Mr. Yeo: Yes.

Housing, London

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the last 10 years, in London *(a)* the number of local authority dwellings built, *(b)* the number sold, *(c)* the number built by housing associations, *(d)* the number of homeless persons and *(e)* his estimate of the number sleeping on the streets.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information about the numbers of dwellings built by London boroughs and by housing associations in London can be found in tables 1.1 to 1.10 inclusive of "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas 1980-1989", a copy of which is in the Library.

Tables of council house sales showing year-by-year sales for each local authority are regularly placed in the Library. A table showing sales to September 1990 will be placed in the Library shortly.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure accommodation for households who have been found to be homeless, or threatened with homelessness, under part III of the Housing Act 1985. The numbers of households accepted and found accommodation are reported quarterly to the Department. Estimates for London for the years 1980-1989 are set out in the table.

Year	*Number of households accepted and found accommodation*
1980	17,480
1981	18,470
1982	21,110
1983	24,050
1984	25,180
1985	27,390
1986	29,740
1987	29,710
1988	29,320
1989	33,160

Having consulted front-line voluntary organisations, my Department estimates that some 2,000 or 3,000 people sleep on the streets in London. A count of persons sleeping rough is to be carried out as part of the 1991 population census.

Water Pollution

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a report has been sent to the Commission as required under article 16 of Council directive 78/659/EEC on the quality of fresh waters needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life.

Mr. Trippier: A report covering monitoring in 1989 has been submitted to the Commission recently and copies have been placed in the Library.

Private Water Supplies

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for regulations in respect of private water supplies.

Mr. Trippier: We have issued today a consultation paper seeking views on proposals for regulations dealing with the duties and functions of local authorities in respect of private water supplies. This has been published jointly by my Department, the Scottish Office Environment Department and the Welsh Office. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The consultation paper proposes that regulations should specify the information that local authorities are able to obtain in respect of private supplies in their areas and should require local authorities to prepare and maintain a register of such supplies. Proposals are made about the different classes into which private supplies should be allocated, the parameters for which each class of supply should be monitored, and the frequencies at which local authorities should carry out sampling and analysis in order to determine whether supplies comply with the requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 and the parallel Scottish regulations. The paper puts forward proposals for maximum charges that local authorities would be able to make for carrying out sampling and analysis. It is intended that regulations should come into effect on 1 July 1991 and that local authorities should begin to monitor private supplies from 1 October 1991.

Reserve Forces

Sir Robert McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take to protect the pensions of local government employees who are called up for service as reservists during the present crisis.

Mr. Portillo: The Department has today gone out to consultation on amendments to the local government superannuation scheme designed to preserve full superannuation rights for any local government employee serving as a reservist. They would apply retrospectively with effect from 17 December 1990, the date of the order authorising the call-out of reserves.

If, in any case, an authority declines to make good any shortfall between service and civilian salary, the regulations will provide for the cost of both the employee's and the employer's contribution to be met by the authority. I understand, however, that authorities are in the main indicating their readiness to make good any shortfall in salary and I hope that all will conclude that they should do so.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the level of Government grant to the British Waterways Board for each year since 1979 at current prices; and what is the planned level of grant for future years.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The table shows in current prices the Government's grant to the BWB in the years 1978-79 to 1990-91, together with the board's external financing limit—EFL—which covers grant and borrowing from the national loans fund, for the same period.

	Grant		EFL	
	Cash £ million	1990-91 prices £ million	Cash £ million	1990-91 prices £ million
1978-79	23·0	58·1	26·0	65·7
1979-80	22·8	49·4	25·7	55·7
1980-81	25·6	46·9	30·0	54·9
1981-82	28·4	47·4	31·6	52·7
1982-83	37·6	58·6	39·3	61·2
1983-84	39·8	59·3	40·8	60·8
1984-85	41·8	59·3	42·8	60·7
1985-86	43·5	58·5	44·1	59·3
1986-87	43·9	57·1	44·8	58·2
1987-88	44·0	54·2	45·0	55·5
1988-89	45·9	52·7	44·9	51·6
1989-90	48·1	52·0	46·5	50·2
1990-91	49·3	49·3	49·4	49·4

As a result of the latest public expenditure round, the BWB's EFL, which is expected to be the same as grant for 1991-92, will be £48·7 million, with guideline figures of £46·9 milllion and £45·3 milion for the following two years.

Minerals Act 1981

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to go to full public consultation on the review of the Minerals Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The review of the Minerals Act 1981, announced in "Our Common Inheritance", is already under way. The issues are complex and require careful consideration. The review is expected to take up to 18 months. Any proposals for change arising from the review will be the subject of full public consultation thereafter, in the normal way.

Inner Cities

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table showing the expenditure on each inner city task force and city action team in 1989-90, including both the cost of running the unit concerned and the funds disbursed by the unit and including separately the cost of central support to task forces and city action teams.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* The task forces are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Responsibility for the Government's city action teams transferred to the Department of the Environment in December 1989. Task force and city action team expenditure in 1989-90 was as follows:

Task forces	*Running costs £'000 estimated*	*Funds disbursed £'000*
East Birmingham	129	959
Handsworth		312
Wolverhampton		1,270
Leeds	112	1,212
Middlesbrough	78	980
Coventry	71	879
Doncaster	126	1,619
Hartlepool	104	941
Nottingham	162	998
Leicester		982
Bradford	49	130
Bristol	135	921
Manchester	113	997
North Kensington	133	502
North Peckham	124	766
Rochdale	153	909
Preston		488
Spitalfields	139	859
Deptford	30	48
Granby/Toxteth	65	280
Total	1,723	16,052
City action teams		
Cleveland Coordinating Team	69	648
Liverpool	176	1,121
London	158	874
Manchester	100	473
Birmingham	100	570
Newcastle	190	1,134
Nottingham/Leicester/ Derby	129	719
Leeds/Bradford	109	661
Total	1,031	6,200

The combined cost of central support by both DoE and DTI to the city action teams and task forces in 1989-90 was approximately £716,000. In addition, £1,685,000 was spent centrally on projects to support the work of the CATs and task forces, including research, consultancy and projects by national organisations which operated in most areas.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Unemployed People (Education)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he intends to extend the life of his Department's REPLAN programme of education for the adult unemployed for at least a further year beyond October 1991.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now make an announcement on the future of REPLAN.

Mr. Eggar: The REPLAN programme in England and Wales has been evaluated by the National Foundation for Educational Research, and I have today placed a copy of its report in the Library. Among its main findings were that REPLAN had been successful in raising the awareness of local education authorities and education providers to the needs of the adult unemployed and that as a result provision had improved and participation increased.

It is now for the adult education providers and the LEAs to continue to develop provision for the adult unemployed, drawing on the lessons learnt under the REPLAN programme. We look to them to work particularly closely with the training and enterprise councils which are responsible for delivering the major training programmes for the adult unemployed.

The REPLAN programme will have largely fulfilled the purpose for which it was established when its current term is completed next October, and it is not the intention therefore of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State

for Education and Science and for Wales to extend it for a further term. Neither do we believe that there is a need for a successor programme of general promotion and support to the providers of education and training for the adult unemployed.

We will however take specific action to address specific problems and my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales are today launching a new initiative to improve and increase the provision of adult literacy and basic skills training.

This new initiative will be targeted at unemployed people and at those in work who cannot progress without improved basic skills. It will be overseen by the adult literacy and basic skills unit and will encourage LEAs and TECs to work together to improve basic skills provision in their areas.

The three Departments are making available nearly £3 million over the three years 1991-92 to 1993-94. We expect to fund a pilot programme of some 30 local development initiatives worked up by LEAs and TECs.

The initiatives will be based on an examination of needs and of existing provision in the area. It will be for LEAs and TECs to decide what to propose, but we would expect to see such developments as "compacts" which would prepare people for specific employment; basic skills training in the workplace; and supported self-study and open learning. The lessons learnt from the pilot will be disseminated nationally to assist the development of similar activity in other areas.

Schools Expenditure

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil at primary and secondary schools in Lancashire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79, at constant prices.

Mr. Fallon: Lancashire spent £320 per nursery and primary pupil in 1978-79 and £985 in 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. It spent £495 per secondary pupil in 1978-79 and £1,620 in 1988-89. At 1988-89 prices those figures are £700 and £985 respectively for nursery and primary schools, and £1,085 and £1,620 respectively for secondary schools.

Loan Sanctions

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria he used to determine to grant *(a)* the London borough of Greenwich and *(b)* all neighbouring boroughs loan sanction for education capital projects; and what the level is in (i) Greenwich and (ii) each neighbouring borough.

Mr. Fallon: The criteria for all LEAs in England were set out in the reply my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 17 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *41-50*.

In-service Training

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to abolish the five in-service training days for teachers which were added to the second year in 1987.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have no plans to change the provisions in the school teachers' pay and conditions document with regard to non-contact days for in-service training and other activities. These require teachers to be available for work for 195 days in any year, of which 190 days shall be days on which they may be required to teach pupils.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales have taken early retirement in each of the years since 1979 on grounds of (i) redundancy/interests of efficiency and (ii) health.

Mr. Fallon: Separate figures in respect of ill-health retirements from *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information relating to premature retirement figures, together with the total number of ill-health retirements, is as follows:

Financial year	*Interests of efficiency*	*Redundancy*	*Total*
England			
1979-80	2,106	1,106	3,122
1980-81	4,092	1,753	5,845
1981-82	5,391	2,796	8,187
1982-83	6,165	2,492	8,657
1983-84	5,839	2,769	8,608
1984-85	6,682	3,129	9,811
1985-86	6,776	2,700	9,476
1986-87	6,547	1,860	8,407
1987-88	5,591	1,460	7,051
1988-89	8,357	3,222	11,579
1989-90	8,947	2,595	11,542
Wales			
1979-80	336	20	356
1980-81	456	40	496
1981-82	754	62	816
1982-83	698	94	792
1983-84	610	34	644
1984-85	830	34	864
1985-86	677	83	760
1986-87	593	98	691
1987-88	455	47	5-2
1988-89	614	167	781
1989-90	686	80	766

Ill-health retirements
England and Wales

Financial year	*Number*
1979-80	1,617
1980-81	1,449
1981-82	1,582
1982-83	1,910
1983-84	2,170
1984-85	2,447
1985-86	2,698
1986-87	2,736
1987-88	2,551
1988-89	3,412
1989-90	4,123

Higher Education

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 16 January 1991, column *506*, if he will place in the Library the report, "International Comparisons and Higher Education."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A copy of the report "International Comparisons of Higher Education" has been placed in the Library.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* listing the capital allocations for each grant-maintained school for 1990-91 and 1991-92, with the number of pupils on the roll of each school and the name of the local education authority in which it is situated with totals.

Mr. Eggar: The table lists the total value of the allocations for named capital projects in grant-maintained schools to begin in the two years. Each grant-maintained school is eligible to claim an amount of capital grant calculated according to a formula which takes account of the number of pupils on roll. Schools becoming grant-maintained during the course of the financial year are also eligible to claim grant for the part year. The grant is to be used for small capital works and purchase of items of equipment. For 1990-91 the formula was £13,000 plus £6 per pupil on roll. For 1991-92 the formula will be £19,000 plus £9 per pupil on roll.

School	*Former maintaining LEA*	*Pupil number January 1990*	*Named capital allocations*	
			For projects beginning in 1990-91[1] *(£ thousands)*	*For projects beginning in 1991-92*[1] *(£ thousands)*
Adams' Grammar School	Shropshire	445	—	21
Audenshaw High School	Tameside	714	575	225
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	Lancashire	717	713	—
Bankfield High School	Cheshire	428	480	—
Baverstock GM School	Birmingham	1,037	275	—
Beechen Cliff School	Avon	774	480	320
Bishopshalt School	Hillingdon	917	—	206
Bournemouth Grammar School	Dorset	869	—	300
Bridgewater Hall School	Buckinghamshire	1,155	—	65
Bullers Wood School for Girls	Bromley	942	—	228
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	Kensington	614	219	—
Carre's Grammar School	Lincolnshire	380	—	630
Castle Hall GM School	Kirklees	394	11	105
Claremont High School	Brent	881	328	120
Colyton	Devon	421	950	—
Ecclesbourne School	Derbyshire	1,223	—	400
Francis Bacon School	Hertfordshire	466	—	105
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys	Birmingham	777	—	953
Heckmondwike Grammar School	Kirklees	584	198	252
Hendon School	Barnet	805	180	200
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	Lancashire	886	155	
London Nautical School	Southwark	398	100	50
London Oratory School	Hammersmith	1,184	151	216
Long Field High School	Leicestershire	352		236
Netherthorpe School	Derbyshire	571	65	
Old Swinford Hospital	Dudley	525	35	500
Pate's Grammar School	Gloucestershire	1,010		1,500
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys	Barnet	1,036	90	
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School	Lincolnshire	329	100	503
Queensbury School	Bedfordshire	641	57	
Ribston Hall High School	Gloucestershire	417	295	
St. Francis Xavier's College	Liverpool	1,012	32	200
Skegness Grammar School	Lincolnshire	539	92	63
Small Heath School	Birmingham	780	50	105
Southfield School for Girls	Northamptonshire	579		650
Southlands School	Berkshire	529	46	113
St. James' CE School	Bolton	655	650	
The Grammar School for Girls, Wilmington	Kent	415	44	45
The Kings School	Lincolnshire	762	128	
Watford Boys Grammar School	Hertfordshire	1,028		80
Wilson's School	Sutton	753	200	
Totals		28,944	6,699	8,391

[1] Financial Year.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the changes in financial arrangements when a school obtains grant-maintained status.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The principal changes when a school becomes grant-maintained are:

Annual maintenance grant is paid to it by the Department and recouped as appropriate from the school's former maintaining local education authority;

Certain specific grants are available to the school which may also apply for capital grant; and

The school's accounting, financial control and reporting arrangements must take account of guidance from the Department.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the plans for capital grant expenditure on grant-maintained schools for the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: The planned level of capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools in 1991-92 is £10·5 million. Grant-maintained schools are receiving allocations for named capital projects with a total value of £8·4 million to begin in 1991-92. It is assumed that about £4·5 million of this sum will be spent in 1991-92.

When schools become grant maintained we want to ensure they are set up on a sound basis. This has led, on average, to higher capital allocations for the GM sector in 1991-92 than for LEA-maintained schools.

Of the 56 eligible schools, 28 have received an allocation for a named capital project; two have a project on a design list which will enable the school to proceed with the planning stages of the project; and nine schools which were approved for grant-maintained status towards the end of 1990 will have their capital bids considered in the next few weeks. An announcement will be made in due course.

Priority in the allocations has been given to schools' most pressing needs, including projects related to the health and safety of pupils, and to projects concerned with the introduction of the national curriculum, especially in science and technology. Each grant-maintained school is eligible to receive a formula-based allocation to be used for small capital works and items of capital equipment. The average allocation is £25,000, which is 50 per cent. higher on average than the allocations in 1990-91. The total cost in 1991-92 for the grant-maintained schools already approved for grant-maintained status is about £1·5 million.

The remaining £4·5 million of expenditure in 1991-92 is available to allow for expenditure arising from projects begun in 1990-91, the prospect of allocations to some of the nine schools whose bids were not requested until the latter part of January, part-year formula allocations for schools becoming grant-maintained during the 1991-92 financial year, and a contingency margin.

The following is a list of the named capital allocations.

Capital allocations for grant-maintained schools in 1991-92
Named Project Allocations

All figures are in £000s

School	*Project*	*Total named project allocation*
Adams Grammar School, Newport	Health and Safety	21
	Removal of asbestos	
Audenshaw High School	Conversion into Design and Tech room and rewiring	225
Beechen Cliff School, Bath	Technology Block	320
Bishopshalt School, Hillingdon	Science Block extension	206
Bournemouth Grammar School	Repairs (inc. roof repairs and rewiring)	300
Bridgewater Hall School, Milton Keynes	Boiler replacement	65
Bullers Wood School, Chislehurst	Refurbishment and extension of 3 labs	228
Carre's Grammar School, Sleaford	Technology and Labs extension	630
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School, Mirfield	Roof renewal	65
	Concrete frame repairs	40
		105
Chalvedon School, Basildon	Bid still to be considered	
Claremont High School, Kenton	Technology rooms	100
	Health and Safety	20
		120
Crossley Heath, Halifax	Bid still to be considered	
Ecclesbourne School, Duffield	Repairs (inc. re-roofing and rewiring)	400
Francis Bacon School, St. Albans	Modern Languages classrooms	105
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys, Birmingham	Science Block	953
Hardley Secondary School, Southampton	Bid still to be considered	
Heckmondwike Grammar School	Technology refurbishment	252
Hendon School	Replacement of windows (Main building)	108
	Refurbishment of Biology Lab	92
		200
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	Bid still to be considered	
London Nautical School	Rewiring	50
London Oratory School	Design and Technology Facilities	216
Long Field High School, Melton Mowbray	Roof repairs	236
North Halifax High School	Bid still to be considered	
Old Swinford Hospital, Stowbridge	Provision of science laboratories	500
Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham	Replacement of existing accommodation	1,500
Queen Elizabeth's Grant-Maintained School, Alford	Replace temporary accommodation and improve Design and Technology	503
St. Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool	Repairs	200
Skegness Grammar School	Modernise Kitchen and Canteen	63
Small Heath School	Maths suite	25
	Replacement of windows	80
		105
Southfield School for Girls, Kettering	Technology block	650
Southlands School, Reading	Re-roofing of Art block	57
	corridor	12
	senior school	44
		113
St. George's School, Sleaford	Bid still to be considered	
Stratford School, Newham	Bid still to be considered	
The Grammar School for Girls, Wilmington	Conversion to CDT	45
The Maplesdon Noakes School, Maidstone	Bid still to be considered	
Watford Boys Grammar School	Re-roofing	80
Wymondham College, Norfolk	Bid still to be considered	

Projects for design stage

School	Project	Indicated cost
Guildford County School	Library and Business Studies provision	770
Wolverhampton High School for Girls	Technology Rooms	850
Totals for design stage		1,620

School Leavers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of school leavers attained *(a)* university minimum entrance qualifications and *(b)* no qualifications in England and Wales in 1988-89.

Mr. Eggar: In the academic year 1988-89, the percentage of school leavers in question in England was as shown.

School Leavers—England

	Per cent.
2+ A-levels	17·4
No qualifications	7·9
Total leavers (000s)	617·71

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of school leavers left at ages *(a)* 16 years, *(b)* 17 years and *(c)* 18 years or later in England and Wales in 1988-89.

Mr. Eggar: In the academic year 1988-89, the percentage of school leavers in England, who left at the ages in question, was as shown.

School leavers—England

	Per cent.
Aged 16	65·2
Aged 17	11·5
Aged 18 or over	23·3
Total leavers (000s)	617·71

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Forestry Conservation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total amount of aid given in each year since 1980 for forestry conservation projects.

Mrs. Chalker: 1. The Overseas Development Administration's statistics do not show separate figures for aid expenditure on forestry conservation. Figures for bilateral aid expenditure on all types of forestry in the years 1980 to 1986, including research, training, other technical co-operation and Commonwealth Development Corporation projects, were provided in the written answer of the then Minister for Overseas Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), to the question of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 9 May 1988, at column 9. Figures showing Overseas Development Administration vis-à-vis Commonwealth Development Corporation expenditure for the years 1983 to 1987 were provided in my right hon. Friend's written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) on 15 May 1989, at column *21*.

2. Estimated bilateral aid expenditure on all types of forestry, except training, for the calendar years 1988 and 1989 was:

	Expenditure by Overseas Development Administration £'000	Commonwealth Development Corporation £'000	Total £'000
1988	7,768	3,391	11,159
1989	8,903	2,820	11,724

Details of expenditure on training could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The expenditure on agreed commitments in these years is subject to the time lag effect and will show mainly in 1991 and beyond.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether participants in job interview guarantee work trials will be subject to benefit penalties if *(a)* they refuse to participate in a work trial employment placement, *(b)* they leave a work trial placement early, *(c)* they reject the job at the end of the work trial period, or *(d)* they are dismissed for whatever reason by the work trial employer; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many employers have participated in job interview guarantee work trials in each of the 20 pilot areas; how many claimants have participated in these work trials; how many claimants are currently participating in work trials; and how many participants have got full-time employment with their work trial employer;

(3) whether participants in job interview guarantee job preparation courses will be entitled to the same conditions and terms as those claimants attending conventional restart courses; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many agreements have been made with employers to operate the job interview guarantee scheme in each of the 20 pilot areas; how many unemployed people have taken part in the scheme in each area; and how many participants have secured full-time employment with their sponsoring employer.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Forth: My Department has introduced a range of measures to promote energy efficiency, including:

the creation of a Departmental energy strategy which inter alia commits us to achieve an energy saving of 15 per cent. over the next five years.
the appointment of a Departmental Energy Manager to co-ordinate initiatives in energy conservation.
the setting up of an intensive basic training programme for energy managers at regional and area level.
the setting up of a "spend to save" budget to fund various initiatives.
the setting up of a programme of energy surveys, targeting those buildings with the best potential for savings.
the setting up of computerised energy monitoring and targeting systems to identify energy waste.
guidance to staff on how to become more energy conscious.
the relamping of buildings with energy saving lighting, particularly when a building is being refurbished.

My Department's energy strategy will be closely monitored and other energy-saving measures will be introduced when suitable opportunities arise.

In the financial year 1989-90, expenditure on energy rose by 3·3 per cent., which is less than the increase in energy prices in the same period. Consumption figures for this year are not available. Moreover, my Department's new and revised energy strategy was not introduced until April 1990.

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each region and for Great Britain as a whole the number and proportion of employment training leavers who obtained a vocational qualification.

Mr. Jackson: The following table gives the proportion of trainees leaving employment training between July 1989 and June 1990, the latest date for which information is available, who obtained a qualification or credit or who were awaiting results. Numbers of trainees achieving qualifications or credits towards qualifications are not available.

Employment training
Proportion gaining qualifications or credits all leavers between July 1989 to June 1990

Region	*Obtained qualification or credit* *Per cent.*	*Awaiting results* *Per cent.*
South East	25	4
London	18	4
South West	24	5
West Midlands	20	4
East Midlands and Eastern	22	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	21	4
North West	19	4
Northern	24	4
Wales	23	4
Scotland	24	5
Great Britain	22	4

Source: Respondents to the Employment Training Follow up Survey.

Restart

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people attended a Restart interview in the last six months available for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; and what were the results of those interviews broken down in the manner of the answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *148*.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what numbers of unemployed people (i) attended and (ii) refused to attend Restart training courses *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Bolton in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred these questions for reply.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the current average tariff for bed-and-breakfast accommodation in three-star hotels in central London.

Mr. Forth: My Department does not have this information in respect of the star schemes operated by the AA and the RAC. However, for the English tourist board's "crown" classification and grading scheme, figures from the London tourist board indicate that the current average bed-and-breakfast tariff in central London for three-crown accommodation is £70·00 per night for two people occupying a double room with en-suite facilities.

Factory Inspectors, Stockport

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the occasions on which factory inspectors visited Vernon Mill and Taymar Gas in Stockport during the last 10 years.

Mr. Forth: The following table shows the dates on which factory inspectors have visited Vernon Mill and Taymar Gas in Stockport during the past 10 years:

VERNON MILL

14 January 1982
21 January 1982
28 January 1982
26 March 1982
5 May 1982
3 August 1983
7 September 1983
8 February 1984
16 February 1984
12 March 1984
31 May 1984
12 July 1984
23 November 1984
16 October 1985
29 October 1985
11 November 1985
5 November 1986
11 January 1988
12 October 1988
13 June 1989
4 July 1989
14 September 1989
4 October 1989
12 October 1989
8 November 1989
4 January 1990
21 February 1990
28 March 1990
4 April 1990
21 June 1990

TAYMAR GAS

Meadow Mill premises

6 December 1984
19 March 1985
5 June 1985
10 September 1985
3 July 1986
20 August 1986
16 April 1987
30 April 1987
17 July 1987
3 September 1987
12 July 1988
4 April 1990
18 December 1990
19 December 1990
9 January 1991
11 January 1991

Weir Mill premises

1 December 1981
4 December 1981
15 January 1982
17 February 1982
9 September 1982
6 December 1984
27 March 1985
17 June 1985
28 June 1985
3 March 1987
13 April 1987
16 April 1987
27 August 1987
12 July 1988
7 February 1989
19 December 1990
9 August 1990
17 August 1990
22 August 1990
24 August 1990
30 August 1990
10 September 1990

Earnings

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show for full-time workers the percentage earning less than £100, £110, £120, £130, £140, £150, £160, £170, £180, £190, and £200 per week, giving the information for *(a)* women and *(b)* men (i) manual, (ii) non-manual and (iii) all, both including overtime and excluding overtime, in (1) West Yorkshire, (2) South Yorkshire, (3) North Yorkshire and (4) Humberside.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the new earnings survey is given in the following tables.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence.

April 1990

	Percentage with weekly earnings, excluding overtime, less than:									
	£100	*£110*	*£120*	*£130*	*£140*	*£150*	*£160*	*£170*	*£180*	*£190*	*£200*
(a) *Women*											
(i) Manual											
West Yorkshire	17·8	28·3	42·8	54·9	63·5	71·1	78·2	85·3	88·5	90·6	91·9
South Yorkshire	18·3	29·1	42·9	53·1	61·7	70·9	76·0	83·4	88·6	93·7	97·1
North Yorkshire	19·4	30·1	43·7	54·4	62·1	70·9	81·6	90·3	93·2	96·1	96·1
Humberside	15·7	26·9	40·3	53·0	66·4	70·1	81·3	86·6	91·0	94·0	95·5
(ii) Non-manual											
West Yorkshire	3·0	6·8	14·4	20·5	28·0	34·7	42·5	49·4	53·9	58·0	62·8
South Yorkshire	4·0	8·9	16·0	22·8	29·2	36·2	44·1	51·9	57·7	62·4	66·9
North Yorkshire	5·7	9·8	16·8	24·9	31·2	37·9	45·3	52·6	58·3	62·9	66·4
Humberside	6·9	13·3	19·7	26·4	33·3	38·9	48·3	53·6	58·7	63·5	67·5
(iii) All											
West Yorkshire	6·5	11·9	21·1	28·6	36·4	43·3	51·0	57·9	62·1	65·7	69·7
South Yorkshire	7·2	13·4	21·9	29·5	36·4	43·8	51·1	58·8	64·5	69·9	73·6
North Yorkshire	8·7	14·2	22·7	31·4	37·9	45·1	53·2	60·8	65·9	70·1	72·9
Humberside	9·2	16·9	25·1	33·4	42·0	47·2	57·0	62·3	67·2	71·5	74·9
(b) *Men*											
(i) Manual											
West Yorkshire	2·1	4·6	8·3	14·1	19·5	25·9	33·8	41·6	50·3	58·7	65·5
South Yorkshire	1·6	3·7	6·9	11·0	15·8	21·5	27·4	32·9	39·8	47·7	53·9
North Yorkshire	3·1	4·9	10·0	17·8	25·6	34·8	41·0	51·4	57·5	65·5	70·4
Humberside	2·2	4·9	9·5	14·1	22·0	28·6	34·3	42·0	48·2	53·3	57·0
(iii) Non-manual											
West Yorkshire	1·3	1·9	3·0	4·5	5·5	7·4	10·2	12·6	15·1	17·7	20·7
South Yorkshire	0·8	1·4	2·3	3·7	5·5	7·3	9·1	11·3	13·0	16·7	20·1
North Yorkshire	1·4	2·8	4·7	7·2	9·4	11·0	14·9	17·1	19·3	22·4	26·2
Humberside	2·3	2·9	3·7	5·5	7·6	11·1	14·3	17·2	19·7	21·1	24·8

	Percentage with weekly earnings, excluding overtime, less than: £100	£110	£120	£130	£140	£150	£160	£170	£180	£190	£200
(iii) All											
West Yorkshire	1·7	3·4	6·0	9·9	13·4	17·8	23·5	29·0	34·9	40·8	46·0
South Yorkshire	1·3	2·7	5·0	7·9	11·4	15·5	19·6	23·7	28·4	34·6	39·5
North Yorkshire	2·4	4·1	7·9	13·6	19·2	25·4	30·7	37·8	42·4	48·4	52·9
Humberside	2·2	4·1	7·2	10·8	16·4	21·7	26·5	32·3	37·0	40·7	44·4

Source: *New Earnings Survey 1990.*

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence — *April 1990*

	Percentage with weekly earnings, including overtime, less than: £100	£110	£120	£130	£140	£150	£160	£170	£180	£190	£200
(a) WOMEN											
(i) *Manual*											
West Yorkshire	15·0	23·6	37·3	47·8	58·3	66·7	73·5	80·6	83·7	87·1	89·2
South Yorkshire	16·0	24·0	40·6	50·3	58·3	67·4	72·6	80·6	85·7	90·3	94·9
North Yorkshire	18·4	28·2	41·7	51·5	56·3	65·0	71·8	81·6	85·4	88·3	90·3
Humberside	11·2	20·9	35·8	46·3	55·2	59·7	71·6	78·4	82·1	83·6	88·8
(ii) *Non-manual*											
West Yorkshire	2·7	5·9	13·1	19·1	25·6	32·2	39·5	47·2	51·9	56·2	61·0
South Yorkshire	4·0	8·4	14·1	21·2	27·8	35·7	42·3	49·8	56·1	61·1	65·4
North Yorkshire	4·9	8·9	15·2	23·0	30·1	36·6	43·4	50·1	55·8	60·7	65·0
Humberside	5·6	12·8	18·1	24·8	30·9	35·7	43·7	49·6	56·3	61·1	64·8
(iii) *All*											
West Yorkshire	5·6	10·1	18·8	25·9	33·4	40·4	47·6	55·1	59·5	63·5	67·6
South Yorkshire	6·7	11·8	19·9	27·6	34·5	42·7	49·0	56·5	62·6	67·5	71·7
North Yorkshire	7·8	13·1	21·0	29·2	35·8	42·8	49·6	57·0	62·3	66·7	70·6
Humberside	7·1	14·9	22·8	30·5	37·3	42·0	51·1	57·2	63·1	67·0	71·1
(b) MEN											
(i) *Manual*											
West Yorkshire	1·5	2·7	5·0	8·1	11·4	15·7	20·0	25·5	31·0	37·9	43·0
South Yorkshire	1·1	2·5	4·3	6·5	9·2	11·9	15·9	19·9	24·4	29·8	34·9
North Yorkshire	2·7	4·0	8·2	11·8	16·9	22·0	25·8	31·4	35·8	41·7	47·4
Humberside	1·7	3·7	6·2	8·2	12·5	16·4	19·8	24·5	28·4	32·7	38·4
(ii) *Non-manual*											
West Yorkshire	1·2	1·7	2·8	3·8	5·1	6·6	9·4	11·4	13·3	15·7	18·0
South Yorkshire	0·8	1·2	1·8	3·1	4·2	5·8	8·0	9·9	11·5	14·9	17·8
North Yorkshire	1·4	2·4	3·9	6·4	8·6	10·2	13·5	15·2	17·7	21·3	24·6
Humberside	2·3	2·9	3·5	4·5	6·1	8·4	11·1	14·1	17·2	19·1	22·3
(iii) *All*											
West Yorkshire	1·4	2·2	4·0	6·2	8·6	11·7	15·4	19·3	23·3	28·2	32·1
South Yorkshire	1·0	1·9	3·2	5·0	7·1	9·3	12·5	15·6	18·9	23·5	27·6
North Yorkshire	2·2	3·4	6·5	9·6	13·6	17·3	20·9	25·0	28·6	33·6	38·3
Humberside	1·9	3·4	5·1	6·7	10·0	13·2	16·4	20·5	24·0	27·4	32·1

Source: New Earnings Survey 1990.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show for part timers the number of women earning less than £2 per hour, £2·20 per hour, £2·40 per hour, £2·50 per hour, £2·80 per hour, £3 per hour, £3·20 per hour, £4 per hour, £4·50 per hour and £5 per hour for (1) manual, (2) non-manual and (3) all women in (i) West Yorkshire, (ii) South Yorkshire, (iii) North Yorkshire and (iv) Humberside.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the new earnings survey is given in the following tables.

Part-time females on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence — *April 1990*

Number in the sample with hourly earnings less than:	£2·00	£2·20	£2·40	£2·50	£2·80	£3·00	£3·20	£4·00	£4·50	£5·00
(1) Manual										
West Yorkshire	5	26	53	70	137	226	248	370	384	396
South Yorkshire	7	16	26	43	91	130	100	276	285	297
North Yorkshire	2	6	11	19	44	63	71	123	129	130
Humberside	8	12	15	16	39	101	122	161	170	175
(2) Non-manual										
West Yorkshire	9	12	17	30	85	123	161	306	354	388
South Yorkshire	6	8	10	16	60	77	89	142	184	200
North Yorkshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Humberside	3	5	9	13	44	56	77	121	135	146

	£2·00	£2·20	£2·40	£2·50	£2·80	£3·00	£3·20	£4·00	£4·50	£5·00
(3) All										
West Yorkshire	14	38	70	100	222	349	409	676	738	784
South Yorkshire	13	24	36	59	151	207	277	418	469	497
North Yorkshire	2	7	14	25	68	97	116	199	222	230
Humberside	11	17	24	29	83	157	199	282	305	321

Note: ". . " denotes reliable information not available.

Percentage with hourly earnings less than:

	£2·00	£2·20	£2·40	£2·50	£2·80	£3·00	£3·20	£4·00	£4·50	£5·00
(1) Manual										
West Yorkshire	1·2	6·4	13·0	17·2	33·7	55·5	60·9	90·9	94·3	97·3
South Yorkshire	2·3	5·2	8·5	14·1	29·8	42·6	61·6	90·5	93·4	97·4
North Yorkshire	1·5	4·5	8·2	14·2	32·8	47·0	53·0	91·8	96·3	97·0
Humberside	4·4	6·6	8·3	8·8	21·5	55·8	67·4	89·0	93·9	96·7
(2) Non-manual										
West Yorkshire	1·8	2·3	3·3	5·8	16·6	24·0	31·4	59·6	69·0	75·6
South Yorkshire	2·3	3·1	3·8	6·1	23·0	29·5	34·1	54·4	70·5	76·6
North Yorkshire	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .	. .
Humberside	1·7	2·8	5·1	7·4	25·0	31·8	43·8	68·8	76·7	83·0
(3) All										
West Yorkshire	1·5	4·1	7·6	10·9	24·1	37·9	44·5	73·5	80·2	85·2
South Yorkshire	2·3	4·2	6·4	10·4	26·7	36·6	48·9	73·9	82·9	87·8
North Yorkshire	0·8	2·8	5·5	9·9	26·9	38·3	45·8	78·7	87·7	90·9
Humberside	3·1	4·8	6·7	8·1	23·2	44·0	55·7	79·0	85·4	89·9

Note: ". . " denotes reliable information not available.
Source: New Earnings Survey 1990.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show for part-time women workers (i) average gross weekly earnings, (ii) average weekly hours, total and overtime, and (iii) average gross hourly earnings for *(a)* manual, *(b)* non-manual and *(c)* all part-time women workers in (1) West Yorkshire, (2) South Yorkshire, (3) North Yorkshire and (4) Humberside.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the new earnings survey is given in the table.

Part-time females on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence—April 1990

	Average gross weekly earnings (£)	*Hours* Total	*Overtime*	*Average gross hourly earnings (£)*
(a) Manual				
West Yorkshire	58·6	18·1	0·6	3·14
South Yorkshire	58·3	19·2	1·5	3·21
North Yorkshire	. .	18·6	0·9	3·21
Humberside	. .	17·8	1·6	3·22
(b) Non-manual				
West Yorkshire	89·4	20·6	1·0	4·36
South Yorkshire	88·0	20·4	1·6	4·31
North Yorkshire	. .	20·6	0·8	. .
Humberside	. .	20·7	1·1	3·95
(c) All				
West Yorkshire	75·8	19·5	0·8	3·86
South Yorkshire	72·6	19·8	1·6	3·74
North Yorkshire	68·2	19·6	0·8	3·58
Humberside	68·9	19·2	1·4	3·61

N.B. ". . " denotes reliable information not available.
Source: New Earnings Survey 1990.

Disabled Workers

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last discussed with *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry and *(b)* the Trades Union Congress the special difficulties experienced by disabled people seeking work.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* I have not discussed this subject with either organisation. However, both the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress were invited by my Department to comment on the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", which was published on 29 June 1990, and on the summary paper, "Evaluation of Special Schemes for People with Disabilities", which was published on 2 November 1990.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Syria

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Syria about the human rights situation in Syria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 4 December 1990, Vol. 182, c. *63*.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications he has had with Amnesty International and other human rights organisations about the human rights situation in Syria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We maintain informal contact with Amnesty International and receive representations from other organisations and individuals, including hon. Members, about human rights in Syria.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on whether Syria has ceased to provide safe haven for any groups involved in the promotion of international terrorism; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received welcome assurances from the Syrian Government that Syria rejects acts of international terrorism and will take action against the perpetrators of such acts where there is convincing evidence.

Hong Kong

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he intends to take to ensure that immigration officials in Hong Kong are following correct immigration procedures for Vietnamese applicants; and if he will increase funding to the mission of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The criteria applied by the Hong Kong immigration authorities to determine refugee status are those laid down in the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees. Their procedure follow UNHCR guidelines. The UNHCR is free to monitor these procedures as well as the appeals procedure which is to an independent refugee status review board headed by a former judge. UNHCR provides counselling and legal advice to all asylum seekers during the determination process. In addition, private lawyers are allowed access to the boat people centres to provide legal advice to individual clients.

Although we do not directly fund the mission of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Hong Kong, we are among the major contributors to UNHCR. In 1990 we contributed £19·9 million of which some £8·5 million was for the comprehensive plan of action for Indo-Chinese refugees. We expect our contribution in 1991 to be at least as high as our contribution in 1990.

Ammunition, Belgium

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral reply of 16 January 1991, *Official Report*, column 836, if he will indicate what discussions are taking place on the restrictions placed by the Belgium Government on the supply of ammunition to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During the past weeks we have put several requests to Belgium and other partners for logistic and other support for British forces in the Gulf. Details are confidential. The requests have been under discussion both bilaterally and within the Western European Union. Although the Belgian Government felt unable to meet all our requests, other allies were able to meet the shortfall. The Belgian Government have helped in other ways, notably in providing medical and air transport support. They have also deployed combat aircraft to Turkey and provided other assistance in the region. At the WEU ministerial meeting on 17 January we advised partners that we might be making further requests in due course. We would hope that any such requests would receive swift and sympathetic consideration.

The Gulf

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government were first consulted on the timing of the allied attack on Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in regular consultation with President Bush about the possibility of needing to use force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait at the end of the deadline. He discussed with President Bush the precise timing of the attack very shortly after the conclusion of the debate in the House on 15 January.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bregenz House, Bangor

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for a local public inquiry to be held under article 103 of the Planning Order 1972 into the application to build premises to be known as Bregenz house on the seafront at Bangor.

Mr. Hanley: No. The application did not meet any of the criteria set down in the Planning Order (Northern Ireland) 1972.

Fair Employment

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to assess whether the Brownlow community trust at Craigavon is following good employment practice in keeping with the policy of the Fair Employment Commission.

Mr. Hanley: Brownlow community trust is not a registered concern under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989. The commission has had no dealings with the trust.

Hospitals

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the nature of the proposed capital expenditure envisaged under the heading "Mater Hospital Vacated Spaces" in the draft review entitled "Management Content" issued by the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: It is the adaptation of existing accommodation to provide facilities for a gynaecological unit and a medical unit, including the upgrading of the existing sanitary annexes and ward pantries.

The estimated cost of the works including fees and equipment is £791,000 spread over three years, with £200,000 being expended in 1991-92.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the reason for the proposed replacement of the cooling towers at Belfast city hospital; and what is the estimated cost.

Mr. Hanley: It is to eliminate the risk of an outbreak of Legionnaires disease, with regard to the type of towers in use, their age and the Department of Health guidance document "The Control of Legionnellae in Health Care Premises—A Code of Practice" (1988).

The estimated cost is £700,000.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Eastern health and social services board is permitted to use the proceeds of sale of land, buildings and equipment at the Royal group of hospitals and the Mater Infirmorum.

Mr. Hanley: Each health and social services board is permitted to use the proceeds of sales of its surplus land, buildings and equipment for reinvestment and is free to decide where these funds should be used.

Skilled Workers

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to how many firms in England and Wales experiencing shortages of skilled workers have transferred to or established subsidiaries in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Over the last five years, 12 companies from England and Wales have accepted financial assistance from the Industrial Development Board (IDB) to establish operations in Northern Ireland. These operations are in addition to public sector organisations, such as the Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security and the Passport Office which have set up in Northern Ireland to serve clients in Great Britain.

It is unlikely that their decisions were based entirely on the skill shortages being experienced by many companies in Great Britain, although this may have been the driving force in some instances. Certainly the Province's abundant supply of well-educated and skilled people, eager for work, is a compelling attraction; but Northern Ireland also offers an excellent infrastructure, including a state-of-the-art fibre optic telecommunication system, a lower operating cost base and a very good quality of life for managers who may be asked to transfer. It is for a combination of these reasons, plus the availability of assistance from the IDB, that Ministers remain confident that companies from Great Britain will continue to locate in Northern Ireland.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Loans

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what figures he has on the proportion of commercial property loans to equity in each of the major banks.

Mr. Maples: The Treasury does not have such figures for individual banks. However, aggregated figures showing shareholders' funds and exposure to particular sectors of the economy for members of the Committee of London and Scottish Bankers are published in the committee's annual "Abstract of Banking Statistics" and the monthly updates of this.

Tobacco Tax

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on taxation on tobacco; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on the taxation of tobacco products, but I cannot anticipate his Budget statement.

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show the tax paid on a pack of 20 cigarettes in each Economic Community country as a percentage of the total price and the average price of a pack of 20 cigarettes in each country; and what the figures were five years ago.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The figures for current and 1986 taxation and price levels of a pack of 20 cigarettes in each EC country are as follows.

Excise and VAT on 20 cigarettes in the most popular price category as at 18 January 1991

Country	*RSP*[2] *pence*	*Total tax*	*Tax as percentage RSP*
Belgium	111	80	72
Denmark	231	199	86
France	104	70	67
Germany	145	106	73
Greece	44	31	70
Ireland	181	133	73
Italy	87	63	72
Luxembourg	79	57	72
Netherlands	104	73	70
Portugal	57	42	74
Spain	31	18	58
United Kingdom	180	131	73

[1] Rates of Exchange as at 16 January 1991
[2] Retail selling price
Source: EC Excise Duty tables

Excise Duty and VAT on 20 Cigarettes in the most popular price category as at 4 February 1986[1]

Country	*RSP (pence)*	*Total Tax (pence)*	*Tax as a percentage of RSP*
Belgium	93	65	70
Denmark	230	201	87
France	48	37	77
Germany	132	97	73
Greece	30	[2]18	60
Ireland	171	126	74
Italy	74	54	73
Luxembourg	73	48	66
Netherlands	101	73	72
Portugal	48	34	71
Spain	52	28	54
United Kingdom	150	113	75

Source: EC Excise duty tables.
[1] Rates of Exchange as at 29 January 1986.
[2] Includes sales tax.

Day Nurseries

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost in 1991-92 of replacing the exemption for day nurseries with zero-rating.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Nurseries are not registrable for VAT, so there is no reliable information available on the cost of replacing the current exemption with zero rating.

Trade Balance

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the trade balance with the other countries of the European Community in 1979, expressed in 1990 prices; and what it is now.

Mr. Mellor: Information on trade with member countries of the European Community is not available at constant prices. Information for the EC as a whole is

available at current prices on the Central Statistical Office database, which may be accessed through the Library of the House.

Manufactured Goods (Exports)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of exports of manufactured goods.

Mr. Mellor: In volume terms, exports of manufactures in the year to date—November 1990—show an increase of 9½ per cent. over the same period a year earlier.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the export performance of United Kingdom manufacturers during 1990.

Mr. Mellor: In the 11 months to November 1990 the volume of manufactured exports, excluding erratics, was 9½ per cent. higher than a year earlier. United Kingdom manufacturers' share of world trade is likely to have risen in 1990 for the second successive year. This share has stabilised since the early 1980s, after decades of decline.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress Departments have made under the Government's relocation policy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My predecessor informed the House on January 1990 that, in accordance with the policy announced by the then Paymaster General on 31 March 1988, Departments had already announced decisions to relocate well over 16,000 posts away from the south-east. There are no central targets or preferred locations under this policy. Departments review the location of their work systematically, with a view to finding easier labour markets and better value for money. The guidelines require Departments to consult the regional policy and territorial Departments and DOE Property Holdings about potential relocation venues, and to report progress to the Treasury in the annual public expenditure survey.

By the end of June 1990 Departments had identified nearly 7,000 further posts for location or relocation away from the south-east, bringing the total since 1988 to nearly 23,000. More than 1,000 others have been identified for cost-effective transfer within the south-east, and some 15,000 have been reviewed but judged not suitable for relocation at this stage. Almost 13,000 are still at various stages in the review process. When these reviews are complete, over 51,000 posts in the south-east will have been subject to review—equivalent to 24 per cent. of total posts in the region; and further posts will be reviewed in the coming year.

Three quarters of the posts identified for transfer are destined for locations within assisted or urban programme areas and at least half are expected to be filled through local recruitment. Around 6,000 posts have already been moved since the beginning of 1988, which exceeds the figure for the whole of the period 1974-79 and compares favourably with the 12,000 posts moved or created outside the south-east between 1979-1987.

Successful relocation requires careful planning. Departments exchange experience and, where appropriate, co-ordinate action with other Departments, with some transfers between Departments for staff not wishing to move and with good use being made of the extra flexibilities now available in the personnel management field.

Local Government Finance

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his reply of 14 December 1990 to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, *Official Report*, column *538*, if he will estimate by how much the standard rate of personal income tax would need to be increased if *(a)* education and *(b)* education, fire and police were financed by income tax, assuming no change in the grants paid by central Government to the local authorities; and if he will also estimate savings in community charge benefit in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 January 1991]:* If local authorities spend in line with central Government's assessments in 1991-92, expenditure on education in Great Britain will be around £21 billion, expenditure on education, fire and law and order services will be around £28 billion, and total income from the community charge would be around £14·5 billion.

Assuming no change were made in the level of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates paid by central Government to local authorities, the basic rate of income tax would need to increase by *(a)* 8½p and *(b)* 10p if these services were financed by income tax. However, if education, fire and law and order services were funded in line with these proposals, the extra central Government funding would more than exceed anticipated community charge income for 1991-92. The saving on community charge benefit would be around £2 billion.

Government Telecommunications Unit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply given to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *463*, what direct costs to public funds there were as a result of the negotiations with Racal Data Network Ltd. from 15 February 1990 onwards; where in the public accounts those costs will be recorded; and whether he proposes to allocate additional resources to the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency to continue to prepare a future Government telecommunications service.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* The costs to public funds of the Government telecommunications service—GTS—negotiations, and related telecommunications research, were some £2·4 million. These costs were borne by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—CCTA—the five participating Departments, and the Treasury Solicitor's Department. Expenditure on the project prior to 31 March 1990 was accounted for in the appropriation accounts of CCTA—class XIX vote 13—Department of Employment—class VI vote 2—Department of Social Security—class XV vote 7—Inland Revenue—class XVIII vote 6—Her Majesty's Customs and Excise—class XVIII vote 5—Department of Finance and Personnel (Northern Ireland)—DFP vote 1—and Treasury Solicitor's Department—class X vote 9. Expenditure in the 1990-91 financial year will be accounted for in the following appropriation accounts: Her Majesty's Treasury—class XVIII vote 1—Department of Employment—class VI vote 2—

Department of Social Security—class XVI vote 7— Inland Revenue—class XVIII vote 6—Her Majesty's Customs and Excise—class XVIII vote 5—Department of Finance and Personnel (Northern Ireland)—DFP vote 1—Treasury Solicitor's Department—class X vote 9.

There are no plans to implement an alternative GTS. As I reported to the House on 15 January, the Departments concerned in the GTS negotiations will now be considering, with the CCTA, how best to meet future telecommunications requirements.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to exempt carers of mentally handicapped people from tax on a proportion of their earnings as carers.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* Whether income tax has to be paid on payments received for caring for a mentally handicapped person will depend on the circumstances. In particular, these payments will give rise to a tax liability only if they exceed the actual costs which the recipient incurs in caring for the handicapped person.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received concerning the backdating of tax on income earned caring for mentally handicapped people.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* None.

HEALTH

Theft

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member of Norfolk, North dated 7 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *217*, on health service theft, fraud, and so on, what is *(a)* the number of cases reported to the police by Norwich health authority in each year since 1982, *(b)* the number of cases in which prosecutions subsequently took place and *(c)* the number of convictions and sentences which ensued;

(2) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member of Norfolk, North of 7 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *217*, on health service theft, fraud, and so on, if he will give details of cases *(a)* reported to police, *(b)* where prosecutions took place and *(c)* of conviction and sentence, stating the name of health authority concerned and the nature of the offence in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have written to my hon. Friend.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the numbers of operations and waiting lists for ear, nose and throat operations carried out by year since 1985 in *(a)* Sunderland area health authority, *(b)* Durham area health authority and *(c)* Hartlepool area health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The available information is given in the table. 1987-88 is the first year for which details of operations by specialty and by district health authority are held centrally.

Ear, Nose and Throat Operations.

	Number of operations 1987-88	*Waiting list 31 March 1988*	*Percentage waiting over one year*
Hartlepool	585	142	1
Sunderland	4,122	842	0

	Number of operations 1988-89	*Waiting list 31 March 1989*	*Percentage waiting over one year*
Hartlepool	553	67	7
Sunderland	4,640	1,256	0

	Number of operations 1989-90	*Waiting list 31 March 1990*	*Percentage waiting over one year*
Hartlepool	523	282	3
Sunderland	4,558	1,188	0

Note: Durham figures are included with those of Sunderland. Sunderland provides an ENT service for Durham and South Tyneside District Health Authorities.

Source: Operations KH08. Waiting list KH06, KH07, KH07A.

Nurses (Prescribing Rights)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to permit limited prescribing rights for nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We support the principle of nurse prescribing. Implementation is dependent on the outcome of work currently being carried out, in particular on the economic implications.

NHS Laundries

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what technical criteria are taken into account by health authorities when appointing independent technical consultants to evaluate competitive tenders for national health service laundry services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the health authority concerned. The usual requirements are for wide experience in laundry operations, expertise in assessing the capabilities of tenderers to perform to contract requirements, and knowledge to assist the authority in selecting the most cost-effective service options.

Hospital Meals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* area health authority the average weekly cost of providing meals for in-patients, for the latest date for which he has figures.

Mr. Dorrell: The health service indicators for 1988-89, which are available in the Library, include the average daily cost of meals for in-patients for regional and district health authorities—indicator CA01. These are the latest figures available.

Disability

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received over the past year about when the Disabled Persons' (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 is likely to be fully implemented.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 13 November 1990 at column *111*. Since then we have answered two parliamentary questions and one letter on this issue.

Land Sales (Trent)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the capital expenditure of the Trent regional health authority he expects it to obtain from sales of land.

Mr. Dorrell: It is currently forecast that Trent regional health authority's land sales will make up 21 per cent. of the region's capital spending in 1990-91.

Incontinence

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for reviewing the quality of service and advice available to people with problems of incontinence.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is currently considering ways in which good practice in the provision of incontinence services can be disseminated more widely throughout the country.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Computers

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects Her Majesty's Government to respond to the 1989-90 report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) about computer services for Members (HC614).

Mr. MacGregor: I hope to be able to find time for a debate on this important report before long.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Orders in Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the Orders in Council which have been approved in the current year.

Mr. MacGregor: No Orders in Council have been made in 1991.

Privy Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Privy Council last met; and what topics were discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: The last meeting of the Privy Council was on 19 December 1990. It is not the practice to disclose the proceedings at such meetings.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the current Privy Councillors.

Mr. MacGregor: An alphabetical list of Privy Councillors is published annually in "Whitaker's Almanack" and a list by precedence is published quarterly in *Vacher's Parliamentary Companion*. The list shown in the November 1990 edition of the latter shows all current Privy Councillors with the exception of Mr. Richard Ryder. The formalities for the appointment to the Privy Council of Mr. Alan Clark and Mrs. Angela Rumbold announced in the new year honours list will take place next month.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Glass

17. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to promote the British glass industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department encourages growth in all markets by promoting enterprise and by creating a climate in which all sectors of industry can flourish. There are no plans for any new initiatives specifically for the glass industry.

Post Office

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals to introduce greater competition into the Post Office.

Mr. Leigh: The Post Office's letter monopoly is a privilege, not a right. While we keep the options on the letter monopoly under review we have no present plans to alter the scope of the letter monopoly, although in the event of a cessation or serious disruption to the letter service we would consider suspending it. The Government and the Post Office remain fully committed to the existence of a national letter service available to everyone, including those in rural areas, at a reasonable and uniform tariff.

25. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to ensure that all parts of the country continue to receive a high standard of letter and parcel delivery services.

Mr. Leigh: Decisions concerning aspects of the day-to-day running of the Post Office, such as those affecting the quality of the postal service, are the operational responsibility of the Post Office. The chairman of the Post Office regards quality of service for the customer as a key priority and is constantly searching for ways to improve performance in this crucial area. We welcome his emphasis on achieving better quality of service.

GATT

19. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the Uruguay round of the GATT and its implications for the manufacturing sector in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: As I said earlier, negotiations in the Uruguay round are continuing, and we hope they will yield

results which will be of substantial benefit to United Kingdom industry. As we export about a quarter of what we produce, we stand to gain from the opening up of world markets, and to share in the greater wealth that trade generates.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

21. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Multilateral negotiations to agree a successor regime to govern international trade in textiles after the MFA expires on 31 July 1991 have been taking place as part of the wider GATT Uruguay round. The United Kingdom and EC, together with all other negotiating partners, are committed to integrating the textiles sector into GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and disciplines.

Regional Policy

22. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department intends to bring forward any new proposals in the field of regional policy.

Mr. Leigh: We have no plans to introduce new regional measures, but policy is kept under continuing review. The Government remain committed to an effective regional policy and will continue to make the necessary resources available.

Brewing

23. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals to increase the degree of competition in the brewing industry.

Mr. Redwood: The measures that we have already introduced following the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of beer are designed to sharpen competition in the brewing industry. We have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to keep the effect of these measures under review and will consider further steps to promote competition if it should be shown that they are needed.

Manufacturing Industry

24. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Redwood: Ministers and officials of my Department keep in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters. I met the CBI twice during the week beginning 14 January, once to discuss wider ownership and once to discuss the outlook for pay and productivity.

Iraq

26. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the effect of sanctions against Iraq on British industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1989 visible exports to Iraq and Kuwait formed 0·75 per cent. of our exports worldwide. The effect of sanctions against Iraq on British industry has varied according to companies' reliance on that market, and the extent to which they had taken out insurance.

Political Donations (Company Law)

27. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any proposals to amend company law in respect of political donations.

Mr. Redwood: Companies are required to disclose in their directors' report details of every political donation exceeding £200 made in the course of the financial year. These provisions operate satisfactorily and no amendments are needed.

Office Equipment

28. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the present balance of trade in office equipment with *(a)* the EC and *(b)* the rest of the world.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is no sector in official statistics which covers all office equipment. In the sector of office machines and automatic data-processing machines, however, the United Kingdom had a positive crude balance of trade of £547 million with the EC countries and a deficit of £1,939 million with the rest of the world in the year to November 1990.

Solvent-based Products

29. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the adequacy of the provisions contained in the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act designed to restrict the sale of solvent-based products to minors.

Mr. Leigh: I have received a small number of representations, but I am satisfied that the provisions in the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act are adequate to cut off sniffers' supplies at source. It is now a matter of local enforcement of the law.

Company Sizes

30. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the average size of companies in *(a)* other EC countries and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: No comparable data on the average size of companies in different EC countries are readily available. However, the vast majority of companies in all EC countries are bound to be very small.

Accounting and Auditing

31. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will review the regulations on accounting and auditing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: The statutory provisions on company accounts and auditing are extensive. If the hon. Member has a particular problem in mind and cares to send me details, I shall be pleased to consider it.

Biotechnology Products

32. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the present United Kingdom share of the world market in biotechnology products.

Mr. Leigh: There are no market statistics for biotechnology products since they are aggregated within those for pharmaceuticals, chemicals, agriculture and food.

Business Investment

33. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of new business investment in the black country.

Mr. Leigh: No official survey of new business investment in the four black country boroughs of Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall has been undertaken. Since the beginning of 1988 my Department has, however, committed £19·7 million to industry in the black country in the form of regional selective assistance grants. This figure is associated with an overall investment of £187·3 million and the creation and safeguarding of nearly 10,000 jobs.

Soviet Union (Aid)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what role his Department is playing in the European Communities' aid provision for the Soviet Union.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has been closely involved in the discussion about the Community's package of aid to the Soviet Union.

As the House will be aware from the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 15 January, the Community's package of aid will not be implemented unless the Soviet authorities reverse their recent actions in the Baltic states.

Information Technology

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to facilitate the move to open systems for hardware and software.

Mr. Leigh: The Department is currently playing a leading role in promoting the uptake and use of open systems across business. It is contributing significantly towards generation of international and European open systems standards. Many of these standards are now being implemented by IT suppliers in new products and systems. Encouragement is being given towards establishing a United Kingdom open systems interconnection (OSI) conformance testing facility. Harmonisation of European and international certification schemes, essential for providing assurance that products and systems conform to open systems standards, is being promoted.

The Department's programme of open systems technology transfer (OSTT) aims to make all sectors of industry, both public and private, aware of the business benefits that can be achieved through use of open systems. As part of this programme the Department is assisting in the production of a comprehensive guide listing computer products which are available in the United Kingdom, conforming to open systems standards. Progress in the development of open systems standards for use in the public sector has enabled the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency of Her Majesty's Treasury to produce the United Kingdom Government OSI profile (GOSIP). This advises Departments on how open systems interconnection standards may be adopted when implementing their IT computer procurement programmes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the present level of his Department's investment in safety-critical software systems.

Mr. Leigh: The Department of Trade and Industry uses administrative computer systems which by their nature do not raise issues of safety. However, as part of its responsibility for stimulating best practice in the software industry, it has led the "Safe IT" initiative to stimulate action to improve the reliability of safety-related software and systems. The consultative document, launched in June 1990 in conjunction with several Government Departments represented on the Interdepartmental Committee on Software Engineering (ICSE), includes proposals for standards, training and education, research and development and technology transfer. The Department's aim is to stimulate action which will reflect the concerns of all interested parties—from Government Departments through professional institutions and suppliers to all users of safety-related systems.

Mineral Stockpile

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what type of material is contained in the strategic mineral stockpile.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Member has asked similar questions on two occasions. I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave on 16 November at column *236*.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the capital and current costs and budgets incurred by central Government Departments and local authority departments to cover the planning, implementation and enforcement of the poll tax for each year since 1986-87 until the end of 1992-93 in respect of expenditure on *(a)* transitional grants and other transitional arrangements, *(b)* additional members of staff, *(c)* capital costs of administrative systems, *(d)* collection and enforcement costs, *(e)* expenses involved in diligence, *(f)* additional payments of benefits and *(g)* additional costs of administration for benefit systems, together with total costs incurred in any advertising or promotion relating to new poll tax procedures.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The available information is as follows:

Local Authority Costs

Current expenditure—administration of community charge

Based on local authorities' returns to the Scottish Office, the costs of administering the community charge for the years 1989-90 and 1990-91 are as follows:

	1989-90 Budget estimate £ million	*1989-90 Provisional outturn £ million*	*1990-91 Budget estimate £ million*
Community charge collection	23·3	17·2	38·9
Community charge registration	8·5	8·7	14·3
Total	31·8	25·9	53·2

Notes:

1. Any current expenditure costs incurred in the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 were included within the cost of the running of the rating system and are not separately identifiable.
2. The information for 1991-92 will not be received before mid-February. Information about 1992-93 will not be received before mid-February 1992.
3. Although these figures include staffing costs as well as expenditure incurred in the recovery of arrears, these costs are not identified separately in local authorities' returns.

Current Expenditure—Administration of Community Charge Benefit Scheme

Again based on local authorities' returns to the Scottish Office, the costs of administering the Community Charge Benefit Scheme are as follows:

£ million

1989-90 Budget Estimate	*1989-90 Provisional Outturn*	*1990-91 Budget Estimate*
9·60	9·45	11·02

Note: These figures include the cost to the 3 Islands Councils of administering the Housing Benefit Scheme. In the case of these authorities the figures for the Community Charge Benefit Scheme are not identified separately.

Current Expenditure—Administration of Community Charge Transitional Relief Scheme

Information about the costs incurred by local authorities in administering the Community Charge Transitional Relief Scheme is not yet available centrally.

Capital Expenditure

No information is held centrally on the capital costs actually incurred by local authorities in connection with the administration of the community charge, but additional capital consent amounting to £21 million was provided in the years 1988-89 and 1989-90 for this purpose.

Central Government Costs

Costs in connection with the Community Charge Benefit Scheme are a matter for the Department of Social Security. So far as the Scottish Office is concerned, the costs do not vary greatly from those incurred in connection with the domestic rates system.

Publicity Costs

Costs incurred by the Scottish Office on publicity in relation to the community charge system are as follows:

1987-88 £	*1988-89 £*	*1989-90 £*	*1990-91 £*
481,000	524,000	74,000	10,000

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of local government income in Scotland came from *(a)* domestic rates/poll tax, *(b)* non-domestic rates and *(c)* rate/revenue support grant and specific grants, in each year since 1973-74.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Figures are not available for 1973-74 and 1974-75. The information for later years is given in the table.

	Domestic rates/ Community charge per cent.	*Non-domestic rate per cent.*	*Rate/Revenue support grant and specific grants per cent.*
1975-76	15·55	19·63	64·82
1976-77	14·23	18·62	67·15
1977-78	14·80	19·72	65·48
1978-79	12·01	22·48	65·51
1979-80	12·11	22·89	65·00
1980-81	13·14	24·54	62·32
1981-82	15·58	28·23	56·19
1982-83	16·12	28·57	55·31
1983-84	15·48	27·64	56·88
1984-85	16·19	28·36	55·45
1985-86	17·62	28·34	54·04
1986-87	18·92	29·83	51·25
1987-88	19·47	29·94	50·59
1988-89	19·22	29·19	51·59
1989-90	21·52	25·77	52·71
1990-91	21·73	23·82	54·45

Notes:

1. The figures for domestic and non-domestic rates are derived from data published in the Rating Review for the relevant years up to 1988-89. For 1989-90 and 1990-91 the amounts for the community charge and non-domestic rate income are taken from the Provisional Outturn/Budget Estimate returns made by local authorities to the Scottish Office.
2. The forecasts for rate and revenue support grants and specific grants are final amounts or those applying to the most recent Order.
3. Domestic rates figures are net of domestic rate relief.
4. All figures of domestic rate and community charge income are inclusive of rebates.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure has been incurred by his Department in ensuring slaughterhouses in Scotland meet EC standards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office does not provide any special financial assistance for compliance with EC standards in slaughterhouses. Advice on these standards is available from the state veterinary service.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the annual level of unemployment in Scotland in each year since 1974.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the Scottish industrial work force is unskilled.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Estimates from the 1989 labour force survey indicate that 6·1 per cent. of those in employment in Scotland were in unskilled occupations.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was Scotland's share of United Kingdom employment in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In June 1979 Scotland's share of the civilian work force in employment in the United Kingdom was 9 per cent. In June 1989, the Scottish share was 8·5 per cent.

Fixed Capital Formation

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross domestic fixed capital formation per head in Scotland as a percentage of the United Kingdom total in each year from 1974 to the most recent available date.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The table gives the available information on gross domestic fixed capital formation—GDFCF—per head in Scotland as a percentage of the equivalent GDFCF per head for the United Kingdom from 1974 to 1988, the latest year for which figures are available. The footnotes to the table explain the coverage of the estimates in different periods.

Gross Domestic Fixed Capital Formation Per Head for Selected Industries in Scotland as a Percentage of the United Kingdom[1 2 3]

Year	*Number*
1974	[4 5]124
1975	[4 5]140
1976	[4 5]137
1977	[5]123
1978	[5]125
1979	[5]120
1980	126
1981	130
1982	126
1983	115
1984	113
1985	115
1986	106
1987	93
1988	94

Source: Central Statistical Office.

[1] Leased assets are excluded.

[2] All figures exclude investment in land and existing buildings.

[3] Industries covered are Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Energy and Water supply, Manufacturing, Dwellings and Transport and Communications (excluding sea and air transport). United Kingdom figures exclude GDFCF on the Continental Shelf.

[4] Between 1974 and 1976, there is no information on GDFCF for Transport and Communications.

[5] The 1974-1979 estimates for private dwellings are not strictly comparable with estimates for later years.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures for Scotland's gross fixed capital formation as a percentage of the United Kingdom's, excluding the continental shelf, fixed capital formation for *(a)* all industries and *(b)* manufacturing for 1988 in a form comparable to that provided in his answer of 31 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *589-90*.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is given in the table.

Gross domestic fixed capital formations in Scotland for selected industries as a percentage of the United Kingdom excluding the continental shelf in 1988 are as follows:

Industry	*Per cent.*
All industries covered[1]	8·4
Manufacturing	8·3

[1]The industries covered are Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Energy and water supply, Manufacturing, Transport and communications (excluding sea and air transport) and Dwellings.

Note: Figures exclude leased assets and investment in land and existing buildings.
Source: Central Statistical Office.

Manufacturing Plants

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the closest estimate he can provide of the percentage of manufacturing plants in Scotland which are United Kingdom-owned or controlled; and what percentage of Scottish manufacturing output is derived from (i) Scottish and (ii) United Kingdom-owned or controlled firms.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In 1988, according to the annual census of production, 95·8 per cent. of manufacturing plants in Scotland were United Kingdom-owned or controlled. The corresponding share of Scottish manufacturing gross output was 71·8 per cent. Information on Scottish ownership of manufacturing plants is not available.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investment from the Scottish Development Agency has been allocated in the Monklands, West constituency since 1983.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is set out in the table.

	£
1983-84	941,000
1984-85	1,727,000
1985-86	1,338,000
1986-87	551,000
1987-88	297,000
1988-89	118,000
1989-90	57,000

Skye (Crossing)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the rights of Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. with regard to its future provision of a passenger or a passenger/vehicular ferry service between Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin in the light of a bridge to Skye; what assessment he has made of the potential financial impact upon the economic viability of a toll-funded bridge of some form of ferry service continuing to operate after its completion; what advice he has given to Highland regional council and to the tendering companies, respectively, on these points; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. will discontinue its vehicle service on the Kyle of Lochalsh-Kyleakin crossing when the Skye bridge is opened. It has no plans to operate any vehicle service on this crossing after that time.

A socio-economic study is about to be undertaken jointly by the Scottish Office environment department, HIDB, Highland regional council and Skye and Lochalsh district council on the impact of the bridge on the local communities. This study will assess the local need and demand for a passenger-only ferry.

Highland regional council and the companies tendering for a Skye bridge are fully aware of the situation.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail in the *Official Report*, broken down into each health board area within Scotland, the total numbers of *(a)* nurse regrading appeals, *(b)* successful appeals from the above total and *(c)* total additional expenditure associated with *(b)* arising from the last nursing regrading procedure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the total number of nurse regrading appeals and on the number and cost of successful appeals in Scotland is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Poinding

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to eliminate the use of poinding to gather in poll tax.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No. Poinding is an integral part of the recovery of arrears of community charges.

Criminal Justice Legislation

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to introduce legislation to incorporate any of the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill into Scottish legislation.

Mr. Lang: Provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill which would increase the maximum levels on the standard scale of fines in summary procedure, alter the related periods of imprisonment in default, and enable the courts to recover fines through the attachment of income support, extend to Scotland.

The Bill also provides for changes in the parole system for England and Wales. We intend to introduce, at a suitable opportunity, legislation to implement our proposals, published in July 1990, in response to the Kincraig report "Parole and Related Issues in Scotland" (Cm. 598).

Proposals in the White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public"—Cm. 965—which other provisions in the Bill reflect, extended only to England and Wales.

Timber

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to introduce a freight subsidy for the carriage of timber felled in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Support for the carriage of timber by sea from Scottish island communities will continue to be provided by the tariff rebate subsidy —TRS—scheme. Following a review of the tariff rebate subsidy scheme in 1988, the subsidy for the transport of certain bulk commodities, including timber, by sea from mainland areas is being phased out and will end on 31 March 1991. There are no plans to introduce any freight subsidy for timber traffic carried by other transport modes.

Hospices, Renfrew

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide financial assistance for the development of hospices proposed or being operated by voluntary organisations in Renfrew district.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 1 April 1990 all independent hospices in Scotland which do not require patients to make a financial contribution towards their care qualify for Government funding of at least 50 per cent. of their running costs.

Redundancies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of people made redundant from the former Talbot factory in Linwood who have not worked in full-time employment since its closure.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have no such information.

Sports Facilities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is, for each year since 1985, the average expenditure of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in sports facilities for their pupils in (i) Greater Glasgow, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not collected centrally.

British Sign Language

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which national health service district general hospitals in Scotland provide British sign language interpreters for deaf people; and which charge for this service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Scottish Civil Service

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by department the total number of persons employed by the Scottish Office on 1 January 1991 and on the same date in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table.

Department	*1 January 1991*	*1 January 1990*	*1 January 1989*	*1 January 1988*	*1 January 1987*	*1 January 1986*
The Scottish Office Environment Department	1,264·5	1,276·5	1,255·5	1,305·5	1,324·5	1,342·5
The Scottish Office Education Department	540·5	556·5	544·0	562·5	591·5	599·5
The Scottish Office Home and Health Department	890·5	872·0	855·0	841·0	928·0	908·0
The Scottish Office Industry Department	375·0	380·5	374·0	346·0	336·5	346·5
The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department	1,402·0	1,464·5	1,514·5	1,641·5	1,722·5	1,930·0

Department	1 January 1991	1 January 1990	1 January 1989	1 January 1988	1 January 1987	1 January 1986
Central Services	1,752·0	1,720·0	1,762·5	1,795·5	1,834·5	1,831·0
Total	6,224·5	6,270·0	6,305·5	6,492·0	6,737·5	6,957·5
Scottish Prison Service	[1]3,919·0	3,822·0	3,602·5	3,347·0	3,138·0	2,933·5
Totals	10,143·5	10,092·0	9,908·0	9,839·0	9,875·5	9,891·0

[1] As at 1 December 1990, latest available figure.

The figures take account of the following transfers of staff arising from machinery of government changes:

Date		Number
March 1986	Staff to Royal Botanic Garden	169·5
July 1987	Staff to Scottish Legal Aid Board	52
April 1988	Staff to Crofters Commission/Red Deer Commission	61
Total		−282·5

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons and at what grades are employed in the Scottish Office inquiries and reporters unit.

Mr. Lang: Forty-one officers are employed in the unit as follows:

Grade	Number employed
Chief Reporter [(Unified Grade 3)]	1
Deputy Chief Reporter [(Unified Grade 5)]	1
Principal Reporter	2
Reporter	8
Senior Executive Officer	1
Higher Executive Officer	3
Executive Officer	4
Administrative Officer	15
Administrative Assistants	4
Personal Secretary (part-time)	2

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons and at what grades are employed as clerks in *(a)* the sheriff courts, *(b)* the Court of Session and *(c)* the High Court of Justiciary.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Staff of the Court of Session and of the High Court of Justiciary are now trained to be competent in all the work of the supreme courts and are no longer separately identified. Clerks in both the supreme courts and the sheriff courts have specific and separate job titles but are shown in the equivalent civil service grades in the table.

Grade	Supreme courts	Sheriff courts
Grade 5	1	1
Grade 6	—	5
Grade 7	3	6
SEO	22	14
HEO	9	61
EO	16	153·5
AO	9	[1]197·5

[1] Includes [illegible]lerk/typists.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are employed and in what grade in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland who work *(a)* in agriculture and *(b)* in fishing.

Mr. Lang: At 1 January 1991 the number of staff employed in the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department was 1,402 of whom 873 were employed in association with the Department's agricultural responsibilities and 529 in association with fisheries responsibilities. Details of the staff by grade in each of the areas are as follows:—

Grade	Agriculture	Fisheries	Total
Open Structure			
Grade 2—Deputy Secretary	0·5	0·5	1·0
Grade 3—Under Secretary	1·0	1·0	2·0
Grade 4—Chief Scientific Officer	—	1·0	1·0
Grade 4—Chief Agricultural Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 5—Assistant Secretary	6·0	3·0	9·0
Grade 5—Deputy Chief Scientific Officer	2·0	1·0	3·0
Grade 5—Senior Economic Adviser	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 5—Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 6—Senior Principal Scientific Officer	7·0	5·0	12·0
Grade 6—Chief Inspector, Sea Fisheries	—	1·0	1·0
Grade 6—Assistant Chief Agricultural Officer	5·0	—	5·0
Grade 6—Chief Surveyor	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 7—Principal	14·5	6·0	20·5
Grade 7—Principal Scientific Officer	5·0	27·0	32·0
Grade 7—Deputy Chief Inspector, Sea Fisheries	—	2·0	2·0
Grade 7—Statistician	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 7—Economic Adviser	3·0	—	3·0
Grade 7—Inspector, Salmon Fisheries	—	1·0	1·0
Grade 7—Chief Fatstock Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Grade 7—Surveyor	5·0	—	5·0
Administrative grades			
Senior Executive Officer	8·0	4·0	12·0
Higher Executive Officer	37·5	10·0	47·5
Executive Officer	57·5	18·0	75·5

Grade	Agriculture	Fisheries	Total
Administrative Officer	123·5	21·0	144·5
Administrative Assistant	106·0	12·5	118·5
Professional, Technical and Scientific Grades			
Senior Economic Assistant	1·0	—	1·0
Economic Assistant	1·5	—	1·5
Senior Assistant Statistician	1·0	1·0	2·0
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	14	—	14
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	11	1·0	12
Professional and Technical Officer	31	7·0	38
Senior Scientific Officer	5·0	43	48
Higher Scientific Officer	18	39	57
Scientific Officer	17	39	56
Assistant Scientific Officer	27·5	24	51·5
Principal Agricultural Officer	13	—	13
Senior Agricultural Officer	53	—	53
Higher Agricultural Officer	52	—	52
Agricultural Officer	98	—	98
Chief Food and Dairy Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Food and Dairy Officer	4·0	—	4·0
Assistant Food and Dairy Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Principal Horticultural Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Senior Horticultural Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Higher Horticultural Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Horticultural Officer	2·0	—	2·0
Principal Poultry Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Meat and Livestock Officer	2·0	—	2·0
Higher Marketing Officer	7·0	—	7·0
Marketing Officer	8·0	—	8·0
Farm Manager	2·0	—	2·0
Mapping and Charting Officer	1·0	—	1·0
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 1	3·0	—	3·0
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 2	2·0	—	2·0
Technical Grade 1	2·0	—	2·0
Technical Grade 2	5·0	—	5·0
Senior Photographer	1·0	—	1·0
Principal Photographer	—	1·0	1·0
Graphics Officer	—	1·0	1·0
Inspector of Sea Fisheries	—	8·0	8·0
Fishery Officer 1	—	22	22
Fishery Officer 2	—	31	31
Collector of Fisheries Statistics	—	0·5	0·5
Marine Superintendent	—	1·0	1·0
Engineer Superintendent	—	1·0	1·0
Commander	—	5·0	5·0
First Officer	—	12	12
Second Officer	—	20	20
Senior Fishing Mate	—	2·0	2·0
Junior Fishing Mate	—	3·0	3·0
Chief Engineer	—	4·0	4·0
Second Engineer	—	6·0	6·0
Third Engineer	—	25	25
Librarian	—	1·0	1·0
Assistant Librarian	—	1·0	1·0
Secretarial and Support Grades			
Senior Personal Secretary	2·0	—	2·0
Personal Secretary	20·0	8·0	28·0
Typing Manager	2·0	1·0	3·0
Typist	30·5	6·0	36·5
Support Grade Band 1	1·0	—	1·0
Support Grade Band 2	8·0	5·5	13·5
Industrial Grades			
Gardener	3·3	—	3·3
Assistant Gardener	1·0	—	1·0
Patrolman	4·0	—	4·0
Estate Worker	1·0	—	1·0
Grieve	3·0	—	3·0
Experimental Worker	2·0	5·0	7·0
Shepherd	1·0	—	1·0
Stockworker	4·0	—	4·0
Farm Worker	7·0	—	7·0
Tractorman	6·0	—	6·0
Driver/Handyman	2·0	8·0	10·0
Senior Storeman	—	3·0	3·0
Storeman	—	3·0	3·0

Grade	Agriculture	Fisheries	Total
Chief Petty Officer	—	5·0	5·0
Petty Officer	—	2·0	2·0
Chief Steward	—	5·0	5·0
Chief Cook	—	3·0	3·0
Cook Steward	—	4·0	4·0
Steward	—	10·0	10·0
Seaman	—	27·0	27·0
Motorman	—	11·0	11·0
Net Rigger	—	2·0	2·0
Engineering Craftsman	—	3·0	3·0
Electrical Engineering Craftsman	—	1·0	1·0
Semi-skilled Engineer	—	1·0	1·0
Craftsman	—	3·0	3·0
TOTAL	873	529	1,402

Overseas Representation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any changes are being made to the overseas representation of Locate in Scotland and the Scottish Development Agency/Scottish Enterprise in the current year.

Mr. Allan Stewart: For the current year, neither the Scottish Development Agency nor Locate in Scotland have made, nor do they have any firm plans to make, any substantive changes to their overseas representation. The question of overseas representation is, however, kept under regular review to ensure that it is appropriate to prevailing market conditions.

Development Agencies

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make available the staffing structure of the Scottish Development Agency at its headquarters office and its equivalent under Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The staffing structures of the Scottish Development Agency and of Scottish Enterprise are essentially operational matters to be determined by the board of each body. Details of the senior staff employed by the agency are set out in its annual report for 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which industrial sectors had Scottish Development Agency teams working in them in 1988; and how many staff were employed in each team;

(2) which industrial sectors have Scottish Enterprise teams scheduled to start on 1 April; and how many staff are to be employed in each team.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These are operational matters for the bodies concerned and I have asked their chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the relevant expenditure for education on which his Department was willing to pay grant in every year since 1979 at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is set out in the table.

Provision/grant aided expenditure at 1990-91 prices

	£ million
1978-79	1,631·2
1979-80	1,594·0
1980-81	1,466·4
1981-82	1,705·4
1982-83	1,860·4
1983-84	1,842·5
1984-85	1,770·6
1985-86	1,743·9
1986-87	1,746·1
1987-88	1,992·2
1988-89	1,925·5
1989-90	1,936·8
1990-91	1,973·1

Notes:

1. The figures for the years 1978-79 to 1983-84 inclusive include provision for libraries and museums as well as education in accordance with the provision categorisation provided in the Rate Support Grant Orders.
2. The figures for 1978-79 to 1988-89 inclusive are provision figures. Provision was replaced by grant aided expenditure (GAE) with effect from 1990-91.
3. The figures for all years are at 1990-91 prices calculated by means of the Treasury GDP deflator (October 1990).

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the outturn figures for *(a)* all local government expenditure and *(b)* local government education expenditure in every year since 1979 at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is set out in the table.

	Expenditure at 1990-91 prices £ million	*Education expenditure at 1990-91 prices* £ million
1978-79	4,224·6	1,792·8
1979-80	4,573·8	1,799·1
1980-81	4,608·6	1,877·5
1981-82	4,671·7	1,928·6
1982-83	4,690·0	1,934·0
1983-84	4,727·1	1,950·6
1984-85	4,760·3	1,913·6
1985-86	4,695·1	1,871·0
1986-87	4,848·5	1,938·3
1987-88	4,959·7	2,001·4
1988-89	5,012·8	2,026·8
1989-90	5,065·5	2,080·9
1990-91	5,131·7	2,097·1

Notes

1. The figures in column 1 are inclusive of loan and leasing charges while those in column 2 are exclusive of such charges as separate loan and leasing charges for education are not readily available.
2. The figures are at final outturn to 1988-89, provisional outturn for 1989-90 and budget estimate for 1990-91.
3. All years have been converted to 1990-91 prices by means of the Treasury GDP deflator (October 1990).

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, following his announcement of increased assistance for business ratepayers, if he will make a statement on non-domestic rates for 1991-92.

Mr. Ian Lang: I am delighted that the additional resources which have become available to me allow greater progress to be made next year towards full harmonisation of non-domestic rates. The reduction of £100 million which I announced to the House on 17 January is more than twice what we included in the spending plans made last year and will mean a significant reduction in the gap between rate burdens north and south of the border. In spite of this major increase in funding, local authorities are still being asked to contribute only £10 million through efficiency savings.

The table shows the rate poundage which I intend to prescribe for each local authority in regulations that I shall lay before Parliament shortly. These regulations will revoke those made last week. The rate poundage reductions apply across the board to all authorities with the exception of Shetland where a reduction of about 6 per cent., around two thirds of the average, is sufficient to bring the local rate into line with next year's national non-domestic rate in England of 38·6p. There will, therefore, be no need for reductions in the Shetland rate poundage in future years under this policy and the number of areas in Shetland's position will increase as the policy proceeds to its conclusion.

As I also announced on 17 January, as a result of the larger reduction in poundages than previously intended I propose to reduce the level of derating next year from its present level of 35 to 30 per cent., not 32 per cent. I have already indicated that I intend reviewing the way in which poundages and derating may be reduced in future and the powers available to me, which do not allow me at the present time to set different levels of industrial derating in different areas within Scotland, and I would welcome the views of interested bodies on these matters.

	1 *1990-91 poundages*	*2* *1991-92 Pre-NNDR reduction*	*3* *1991-92 poundages*	*4* *1991-92 poundages at ratepayer level*	*5* *Reduction to ratepayer*
Borders	36·0	39·9	36·5	—	—
Central	41·7	46·2	42·3	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	38·3	42·5	38·9	—	—
Fife	46·1	51·1	46·8	—	—
Grampian	34·2	37·9	34·7	—	—
Highland	41·3	45·8	41·9	—	—
Lothian	47·5	52·7	48·2	—	—
Strathclyde	46·0	51·0	46·7	—	—
Tayside	43·0	47·7	43·6	—	—
Berwickshire	7·5	8·3	7·6	44·1	4·1
Ettrick and Lauderdale	8·5	9·4	8·6	45·1	4·2
Roxburgh	9·4	10·4	9·5	46·0	4·3
Tweedale	7·2	8·0	7·3	43·8	4·1
Clackmannan	14·9	16·5	15·1	57·4	5·3
Falkirk	12·2	13·5	12·4	54·7	5·0
Stirling	18·1	20·1	18·4	60·7	5·6
Annandale and Eskdale	9·1	10·1	9·2	48·1	4·5
Nithsdale	9·1	10·1	9·2	48·1	4·5
Stewartry	7·9	8·8	8·0	46·9	4·4
Wigtown	7·4	8·2	7·5	46·4	4·3
Dunfermline	10·1	11·2	10·2	57·0	5·3
Kirkcaldy	12·6	14·0	12·8	59·6	5·5
North East Fife	11·3	12·5	11·5	58·3	5·3
Aberdeen City	11·0	12·2	11·2	45·9	4·2
Banff and Buchan	9·8	10·9	9·9	44·6	4·2
Gordon	7·9	8·8	8·0	42·7	4·0
Kincardine and Deeside	6·5	7·2	6·6	41·3	3·8
Moray	8·2	9·1	8·3	43·0	4·0
Badenoch and Strathspey	6·3	7·0	6·4	48·3	4·5
Caithness	9·8	10·9	9·9	51·8	4·9
Inverness	7·5	8·3	7·6	49·5	4·6
Lochaber	11·4	12·6	11·6	53·5	4·9
Nairn	6·3	7·0	6·4	48·3	4·5
Ross and Cromarty	9·8	10·9	9·9	51·8	4·9
Skye and Lochalsh	9·4	10·4	9·5	51·4	4·8
Sutherland	7·1	7·9	7·2	49·1	4·6
East Lothian	13·4	14·9	13·6	61·8	5·8
Edinburgh City	13·1	14·5	13·3	61·5	5·7
Midlothian	13·4	14·9	13·6	61·8	5·8
West Lothian	11·8	13·1	12·0	60·2	5·6
Argyll and Bute	14·9	16·5	15·1	61·8	5·7
Bearsden and Milngavie	10·3	11·4	10·4	57·1	5·3
Clydesbank	15·3	17·0	15·5	62·2	5·8

	1 1990-91 poundages	2 1991-92 Pre-NNDR reduction	3 1991-92 poundages	4 1991-92 poundages at ratepayer level	5 Reduction to ratepayer
Clydesdale	13·2	14·6	13·4	60·1	5·5
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	13·0	14·4	13·2	59·9	5·5
Cumnock and Doon Valley	13·4	14·9	13·6	60·3	5·6
Cunninghame	16·1	17·9	16·3	63·0	5·9
Dumbarton	14·9	16·5	15·1	61·8	5·7
East Kilbride	11·2	12·4	11·4	58·1	5·3
Eastwood	7·9	8·8	8·0	54·7	5·1
Glasgow City	20·9	23·2	21·2	67·9	6·3
Hamilton	14·2	15·7	14·4	61·1	5·6
Inverclyde	12·6	14·0	12·8	59·5	5·5
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	13·0	14·4	13·2	59·9	5·5
Kyle and Carrick	13·4	14·9	13·6	60·3	5·6
Monklands	14·2	15·7	14·4	61·1	5·6
Motherwell	12·9	14·3	13·1	59·8	5·5
Renfrew	14·2	15·7	14·4	61·1	5·6
Strathkelvin	12·6	14·0	12·8	59·5	5·5
Angus	10·6	11·8	10·8	54·4	5·1
Dundee City	16·9	18·7	17·1	60·7	5·7
Perth and Kinross	11·0	12·2	11·2	54·8	5·1
Orkney	39·3	43·6	39·9	39·9	3·7
Shetland	37·1	41·1	38·6	38·6	2·5
Western Isles	57·6	63·9	58·4	58·4	5·5

GP Budgets

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of general practitioner firms that have applied to become budget holders in each health board area in Scotland; how many of these firms operate practices in rural areas; and when he expects to be able to confirm the final numbers of practices to be approved.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* So far, four practices—or in some cases groups of practices—have sought formal approval to commence fundholding from 1 April 1991. The health boards responsible are currently in the final stages of determining these applications. Details of these applications are provided in the table, including location as an indicator of degree of rurality.

Health Board and Location	*Number of Practices*
Tayside	2
Forfar	
Dundee	
Lothian	1
Edinburgh	
Argyll and Clyde	1
Helensburgh	

There is no time limit for the submission of applications, and a number of other practices are known to be working towards taking part in the scheme as from a later date.

Carstairs Hospital

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the number of patients at Carstairs hospital who have been kept there principally because *(a)* they are mentally disturbed criminals, *(b)* they are mentally ill but not criminals, *(c)* they are mentally handicapped and *(d)* other reasons for each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* Patients at the state hospital are classified as either restricted or state patients or detained non-restricted patients. Restricted patients have either been convicted of, or have been alleged to have committed, a criminal offence, but are considered by medical opinion to be suffering from a treatable mental disorder and to constitute a serious danger to the public. Detained patients will have previously been receiving treatment in ordinary psychiatric hospitals for mental disorder on a compulsory basis but have become sufficiently dangerous either to themselves or others to require to be detained in the secure conditions at Carstairs. The majority of these will not have committed any criminal offences.

The numbers in the categories requested are as follows:

	(a) Mentally disturbed patients who have committed offences	*(b) Patients who are Mentally ill*	*(c)*[1] *Patients who have mental handicap*	*Other*
1986	157	70	42	—
1987	146	64	49	—
1988	148	68	48	—
1989	163	66	40	—
1990	163	59	44	—

[1] These patients are also included under *(a)* and *(b)*

Notes: The figures are at 31 December in each year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sewage Sludge Dumping

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on which two most recent dates the sites were monitored at which he allows Wessex Water and

Welsh Water to dump, respectively, 55,000 and 300,000 tonnes of sewage sludge; what were the results; and what traces of organic and metal contaminants were found.

Mr. Curry: Monitoring at the Bristol channel sewage sludge disposal site was carried out in 1988 and 1990. The surveys were undertaken jointly by the Welsh and Wessex water authorities in 1988 and by the successor water companies in 1990 under conditions of disposal licences issued by the Ministry.

Sheep Dipping

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will arrange for any inquiry into changes of regulations on sheep dipping to be held in public.

Mr. Maclean: I announced on 21 June 1990 the Government's intention to review arrangements for the control of sheep scab during 1991. I am ready to take account of views expressed by any interested party on this as on all other issues.

Carlisle Office

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his Carlisle office received the application forms at the end of 1989 for the sheep annual premium; on what date they were distributed to farmers; and on what date they were due to be returned.

Mr. Curry: Claim forms for the first application period under the sheep annual premium scheme 1990 could not be completed until certain important details had been clarified by the European Commission. The Carlisle divisional office received the forms on 11 December 1989, and dispatched them to interested farmers on 12 December. The closing date for the lodging of first period applications was 27 December 1989.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent his Carlisle office is currently undermanned; and what requests he has had for extra staff appointments to be made.

Mr. Curry: The number of staff employed in our Carlisle office is currently one below complement in the administrative grades, and one below complement in the farm and countryside service. We have not received any direct requests for additional staff appointments to be made.

Food From Britain

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for the three counties of Yorkshire and for Humberside, the sales of speciality food or drink products that Food From Britain has supported during 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Curry: Neither Food From Britain nor this Department have details of sales by groups supported under the speciality food group scheme, nor has any group in the counties mentioned in fact applied for such support.

Salmonella

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received a copy of the report of the Institute of Economic Affairs concerning salmonella contamination in eggs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a copy of this report and have noted its contents. The Government's policy in relation to salmonella in eggs and poultry has been set out in evidence provided to the Select Committee on Agriculture.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) of 14 January, *Official Report*, column *392*, what existing measures will continue to be taken where necessary to protect public health with regard to poultry flocks infected with salmonella typhimurium.

Mr. Maclean: The Minister's authority to exercise his powers under the Animal Health Act 1981 and the Zoonoses Order 1989 remains in force in relation to all types of salmonella. The arrangements for the compulsory slaughter of breeding flocks infected with salmonella typhimurium are to continue unchanged. For commercial egg-laying flocks, the automatic slaughter policy will continue in relation to salmonella enteritidis which remains the prime cause of salmonella food poisoning in humans. If infection from another type of salmonella is confirmed in a laying flock, slaughter will be required if this is considered necessary in the circumstances in order to safeguard public health.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the development of a diagnostic test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement on the progress of his research programme into this disease.

Mr. Curry: A considerable programme of research is in progress, including priority work to try and develop a diagnostic test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy. However, the nature of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, including its long incubation period, means that answers cannot be expected for some time.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the future of milk quotas and whether milk quotas will remain at existing levels.

Mr. Curry: Since 1984 we have accepted milk quotas as the only negotiable means of controlling the cost to the Community of market support in the dairy sector. That cost is still excessive and I should welcome proposals from the European Commission for non-discriminatory quota cuts, together with support price adjustments as a step towards a more market-oriented regime. In the longer run the objective must be to move to levels of support which would permit the abandonment of quotas and allow market forces to influence production levels. In the meantime I have made it very clear that I could not contemplate discriminatory cuts in quota.

Sandwiches

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the British Sandwich Association concerning its quality assurance scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The association has recently informed my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean) of the codes of practice that it is introducing for manufacturers and retailers of sandwiches. In his reply, my hon. Friend has acknowledged the efforts which the association has made since its formation in 1990 to raise safety and hygiene standards in the sandwich industry.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has, by port, on the number of fishing vessels up for sale since the introduction of the new EEC fishing regulations.

Mr. Curry: None. This Department does not collect information about the number of fishing vessels up for sale.

Skimmed Milk Powder

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is proposing to take in respect of the lead-contaminated skimmed milk powder currently held in storage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The butter and skimmed milk powder manufactured from milk withheld from sale in 1989 following the distribution of animal feedingstuffs contaminated by lead was tested by the Ministry. Restrictions on sale were removed after lead levels were found to be well below the limits laid down in the Lead in Food Regulations 1979 as amended. The subsequent disposal of these products was a matter for the milk marketing board, which owned them. I understand that all the product in question has been exported.

Eggs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to complete the funding of the British eggs marketing initiative; and what discussions he has had with the EEC Commission concerning this scheme.

Mr. Curry: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the provision of funds to the British Egg Industry Council for the purpose of promoting the marketing of eggs out of the assets of the Egg Authority, which was abolished in 1986. When due provision has been made for the outstanding liabilities of the former authority it is expected that the remaining funds will be made available to the British Egg Industry Council for promotion and other activities until they are exhausted. It is not possible to say when this will be. Our officials have discussed the British Egg Industry Council's current promotional campaign with the Commission.

Milk

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether there are to be any changes to the existing system of purchasing milk quotas.

Mr. Curry: EC regulations do not permit the sale of quota as such, but quota is transferred in proportion to the areas used for milk production when all or part of a dairy holding is sold, leased or transferred by inheritance. The EC Commission is aware of pressure for greater flexibility in the quota transfer rules, which apply in their present form until the end of March 1992. Proposals for their extension or amendment have yet to be made.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Community directive on milk quality; what actions he is taking in respect of that directive; and if he foresees any future change in its conditions.

Mr. Curry: Council directive 85/397/EEC on intra-Community trade in heat-treated milk came into force on 1 January 1989. It is implemented in England and Wales by the Importation of Milk Regulations 1988 and in Scotland and Northern Ireland by similar provisions. Under the directive our domestic milk production has been formally recognised as achieving the higher "step 2" milk hygiene standards. Denmark is the only other member state to have achieved this.

The Commission has tabled proposals for two Council regulations which would replace the directive and extend its standards to all Community-produced milk and milk products made from cows', goats', sheep's or buffaloes' milk. Discussions are under way and the United Kingdom is seeking an outcome which maintains and improves milk hygiene standards across the Community.

Dairy Inspections

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the charges, in cash and real terms, for statutory inspections of dairies for each year since 1980.

Mr. Gummer: Charges for statutory inspections of dairy farms by Ministry dairy officers were introduced in 30 March 1987. Since then, charges have been as follows:

	30 March 1987 to 31 March 1989 £	*1 April 1989 to 26 August 1990* £	*Since 27 August 1990* £
Routine visit			
(a) higher rate	90	78	87
(b) lower rate	80	60	67
First follow-up visit			
(a) higher rate	—	—	87
(b) lower rate	—	—	67
Subsequent follow-up visits			
(a) higher rate	—	78	87
(b) lower rate	—	60	67

If the charges for routine visits had been raised in line with the retail prices index since March 1987, they would now be £116 (higher rate) and £103 (lower rate). The lower rates apply to inspections of farms with herds of fewer than 20 cows.

Salmon

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement about the report published by his Department on east coast salmon fisheries.

Mr. Curry: No report has yet been published. Work on the review is being completed and we hope to present it to Parliament shortly.

Southern Sea Fisheries

Mr. Adley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about fines for the contravention of local fishery legislation in the southern sea fisheries area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The question of the levels of fines for contraventions of local fishery legislation was raised with me when I met representatives of the Southern Sea Fisheries Committees on 23 October 1990. The matter is under consideration.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 21 and 22 January.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting, together with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary.

The Council heard an oral presentation from Commissioner MacSharry on his personal ideas for possible changes to the common agricultural policy. His approach was based on the desirability of retaining the largest number of farmers as possible in the Community irrespective of the viability of their farms. He envisaged significant cuts in prices and quotas, the introduction of some new direct payments to producers, an expansion of the Community's agro-environmental policies and that a revised policy should be deliberately slanted so as to favour smaller producers. He did not quote figures, but it appeared that changes on the lines suggested would result in a significant increase in budgetary costs.

It was my intention to welcome the Commission's willingness to contemplate radical reform and certain strands of Mr. MacSharry's thinking, but to insist that changes should involve a reduction in costs, to advocate a closer integration of agricultural and environmental policies, and to reject the proposed discrimination against larger farmers on the grounds that this would prevent the emergence of a genuinely competitive European agriculture and would also involve unacceptable distortions between member states. However, only the Irish Minister was able to comment before the Commissioner was suddenly called away by a family bereavement. Discussions will resume at the next meeting of the Council of 4 February. It is not clear if the Commission will have adopted a definite position on CAP reform by them. The Council agreed to extend the Community's sugar regime for two years from 1 July 1991 on the current basis except for a small reduction in the permissible maxima for national aids, including that for cane sugar refining.

Fish Landings

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the increase in the value of United Kingdom fish landings by United Kingdom vessels in comparison with the retail prices index in the period 1980 to 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In 1989 the value of United Kingdom fish landings by United Kingdom vessels was £396 million. This was 78 per cent. higher than in 1980 and compares with an increase of 72 per cent. in the RPI during the same period. The latest provisional figures for 1990 suggest that the value of these landings has kept pace with the increase in the RPI.

In the fisheries debate on 13 December 1990 I may have inadvertently misled the House when responding to a point made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) by referring at column 1180 to individual years rather than to the period as a whole.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Savings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue would be raised by putting national insurance contributions on the income from savings above *(a)* £3,000 and *(b)* £5,000; (i) including pensioners and (ii) excluding pensioners.

Mr. Jack: If such contributions were charged at the current employees' main percentage rate of 9 per cent. on all investment income above £3,000 and above £5,000 the gain to the national insurance fund would be as shown in the table. However, national insurance contributions are levied only on earnings from employment and this is consistent with the approach since the establishment of the National Insurance Scheme in 1948.

Investment Income	*National insurance contribution income including pensioners*	*National insurance contribution income excluding pensioners*
above £3,000	£1·73 billion	£0·96 billion
above £5,000	£1·35 billion	£0·74 billion

This estimate is based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and is therefore provisional.

Tax Withdrawal Rates

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing (i) the number of working heads, (ii) dependants and (iii) families with children facing marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rates in excess of 50 per cent., in the manner of his answer of 25 March 1988, *Official Report*, column *244*.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table:

Combined marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rates 1990-91
Benefit units where at least one partner works full time (000)
Numbers facing combined rates of over 50 per cent.—in bands
Great Britain

Per cent.	Families with children	Couples and single people	Total
100	0	0	0
90 to 99	45	0	45
80 to 89	160	30	190
70 to 79	105	55	160
60 to 69	0	0	5
50 to 59	0	0	0

Projections based on 1985, 1986 and 1987 Family Expenditure Surveys. Uprated to 1990-91 prices, taxes and benefits. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000. Totals may not add due to rounding.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the level of expenditure by his Department on the independent living fund for each of the past five years; and how much of this was spent in Scotland in each year.

Mr. Scott: The Independent Living Fund was established in June 1988. Expenditure published by the Fund in their annual reports was £1·35 million in 1988-89 and £10·08 million in 1989-90. Provision for 1990-91 is £32 million. Information on the cost of awards in Scotland is not available. However, around 9 per cent. of the fund's beneficiaries live in Scotland.

Telephonic Liaison Service

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reason the Department of Social Security Leicester, has discontinued the telephonic liaison service on a special line; and if he will take steps to have this restored.

Miss Widdecombe: The DSS local office at Leicester (Norton street) has replaced its telephone line dedicated to welfare rights inquiries with normal access to benefit sections plus, for particularly complex cases, reference to the assistant manager (liaison). It did so following complaints that the former system was not working. The effects of the new arrangements will be closely monitored.

Income Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of households *(a)* below and *(b)* above average income.

Mr. Jack: Information on the basis of income before housing costs is available for 1981, 1983, 1985 and 1987 and is in the table.

Year	Households below average income (millions)	Households above average income (millions)
1981	12·0	7·9
1983	12·6	8·2
1985	12·8	8·3
1987	13·7	8·1

Industrial Injury Benefit

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each of his local Department offices in the Doncaster area, how many people have made claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit during the current year to date and by year for the last 10 years; how many had their claims accepted; and what has been the total amount paid out in benefits.

Mr. Scott: Figures relating to years before April 1984 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, as could figures about the number of claims accepted and the amount paid in benefit. Such information as is available is in the table.

Claims received

April	Doncaster East	Doncaster West
1990-91	[1]399	[1]382
1989-90	484	721
1988-89	454	523
1987-88	507	568
1986-87	599	844
1985-86	760	1,051
1984-85	425	610

[1] Figures available to December 1990 only.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the budgets for 1990-91 for community care grants for each local office of his Department in Scotland and expenditure by each local office in Scotland to the end of December 1990.

Mr. Scott: Details of annual social fund budget allocation and expenditure for community care grants in local offices are placed in the Library.

Resettlement

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, by departmental region, expenditure on *(a)* resettlement units and *(b)* grants to voluntary organisations and local authorities in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 to date.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the exact form requested, as expenditure on these grants is not recorded by DSS region. However, information is held as follows:

a. Expenditure on resettlement units

Region	1988-89 £000s	1989-90 £000s	[1]1990-91 £000s
Scotland	550	645	411
North Eastern	1,104	1,330	722
North Western	1,086	1,235	813
Midlands	2,200	2,466	1,477
Wales and South Western	816	973	633
London North	1,408	1,558	925
London South	5,403	6,291	3,808
Total	12,567	14,498	8,789

[1] To 31 December.

b. Grants to voluntary organisations and/or local authorities

	£000s	£000s	£000s
Scotland	Nil	Nil	Nil
North Eastern	124	164	587
North Western	22	119	55

	£000s	£000s	£000s
Midlands	43	579	939
Wales and South Western	100	655	630
London North[1] / London South[1]	1,768	1,900	1,322
Total[2]	2,057	3,417	3,533

Note: [1]A split of grants between London North and London South Regions is not available.
[2]Grants were also made to non replacement projects as follows

	£000s	£000s	£000s
Scotland	11	11	8
England and Wales	205	268	190
	216	279	198

A split of these figures between the departmental regions is not available.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a timetable for the closure of resettlement units.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no specific timetable for the resettlement unit replacement programme. The Resettlement Agency, which is responsible for implementing the Government's plans to replace the 22 Department of Social Security resettlement units, is required to replace two units in 1990-91 and a further four in 1991-92. The first two will be the units in Brighton and Fazakerley (Liverpool), on 31 March 1991. Final decisions for 1991-92 have not yet been made.

Social Fund

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the social fund may be used for a single homeless person to meet the cost of a deposit on private rented accommodation.

Mr. Scott: No, but help with rent in advance is available through crisis loans.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the 1991-92 budget for the social fund in gross and net terms broken down into community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans.

Mr. Scott: The 1991-92 budget will be announced nearer the time.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the new take-up figures for income-related benefits.

Mr. Jack: Work on the take-up estimates is well advanced and we hope to publish them around Easter.

Benefit Applications

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest average length of time taken to process applications for *(a)* family credit, *(b)* income support and *(c)* housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information is as follows:

	Working days
Family credit[1]	20·4
Income support[1]	6·4
Housing benefit[2]	—

[1] Data derived from claims cleared during December 1990.
[2] Precise data is not available in respect of housing benefit. Approximately three-quarters of all claims are dealt with within the statutory 14-day period.

Child Support

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the value of child support for each child in standard rate tax-paying families in 1990 prices from 1958 to 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in the table. Figures for April 1991 cannot be given at April 1990 prices until the retail prices index (RPI) for April 1991 is published.

Value of child support[1] for each child in standard rate tax-paying families expressed at April 1990[2] prices (£)

Date[3]	*Children under age 11*			*Children aged 11 to 15*			*Children aged 16 and over*		
	1st child	*2nd child*	*3rd child*[4]	*1st child*	*2nd child*	*3rd child*[4]	*1st child*	*2nd child*	*3rd child*[4]
April 1958	8·32	10·96	11·77	10·35	13·09	13·70	12·48	15·12	15·83
April 1959	7·62	10·36	11·07	9·45	12·29	13·00	11·38	14·12	14·93
April 1960	7·56	10·29	11·09	9·38	12·20	12·91	11·29	14·02	14·82
April 1961	7·36	10·01	10·80	9·13	11·88	12·57	11·00	13·65	14·43
April 1962	6·97	9·47	10·22	8·64	11·24	11·89	10·40	12·91	13·65
April 1963	7·83	10·29	11·01	9·47	12·11	12·65	11·20	13·74	14·38
April 1964	7·67	10·08	10·79	9·28	11·87	12·40	10·97	13·47	14·10
April 1965	7·69	10·06	10·57	9·38	11·66	12·26	11·07	13·35	13·95
April 1966	7·43	9·71	10·20	9·06	11·26	11·83	10·69	12·89	13·46
April 1967	7·21	9·43	9·90	8·79	10·93	11·49	10·38	12·52	13·07
April 1968	6·90	8·65	9·18	8·42	10·16	10·62	9·94	11·60	12·14
April 1969	6·54	8·55	9·06	7·98	9·99	10·49	9·41	11·43	11·86
April 1970	6·19	8·10	8·57	7·55	9·46	9·94	8·91	10·82	11·23
April 1971	7·21	9·14	9·58	8·33	10·32	10·76	9·52	11·44	11·88
April 1972	6·79	8·60	9·01	7·84	9·71	10·12	8·95	10·76	11·17
April 1973	6·16	7·71	8·09	7·29	8·79	9·16	8·20	9·70	10·07
April 1974	7·07	8·37	8·70	8·14	9·35	9·72	9·02	10·23	10·61
April 1975	6·19	8·56	8·56	7·07	9·44	9·44	7·84	10·25	10·25
April 1976	6·49	8·52	8·52	7·23	9·26	9·26	7·91	9·90	9·90
April 1977	6·24	7·14	7·14	6·87	7·77	7·77	7·42	8·29	8·29
April 1978	7·43	7·43	7·43	8·01	8·01	8·01	8·50	8·50	8·50

Date[3]	Children under age 11			Children aged 11 to 15			Children aged 16 and over		
	1st child	2nd child	3rd child[4]	1st child	2nd child	3rd child[4]	1st child	2nd child	3rd child[4]
April 1979	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22	9·22
November 1980	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55	8·55
November 1981	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44	8·44
November 1982	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85	8·85
November 1983	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38	9·38
November 1984	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42	9·42
November 1985	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13	9·13
July 1986	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11	9·11
April 1987	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91	8·91
April 1988	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57	8·57
April 1989	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94	7·94
April 1990	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25	7·25

[1] The combined value of child tax allowance after clawback and family allowance/child benefit.
[2] Reflects the April 1990 value of child support at the dates of uprating based on the movement in the general Index of retail prices.
[3] Child tax allowance ceased after the 1978-79 tax year and uprating dates are shown from 1979 onwards.
[4] And subsequent children.

Dependants

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for the latest date available the number of dependants of unemployed people broken down into spouses and children.

Mr. Jack: On the basis of the statistical information regarding unemployment benefit and income support in payment at May 1989, the number of dependants of unemployed people is estimated to be as follows:

	Estimated number
Adults[1]	378,245
Children[2]	607,000

[1] It is not possible to isolate spouses. The figure is based on the number of cases where income support is payable in respect of a partner and, in the case of unemployment benefit, the number of adult dependency increases.
[2] All children under 16 plus those under 19 in full-time education.

Deductions from Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households, from data taken for the Annual Statistical Inquiry, in 1989 and 1990, are having weekly deductions made from their supplementary benefit or income support as appropriate, for (i) electricity and (ii) gas of *(a)* under £2 per week and *(b)* in each £1 band above £2 per week up to £40 per week.

Miss Widdecombe: The information available is shown in the table.

May 1989[2]

Amount of deductions[1]	Gas	Electricity
0·00-2·00	3,000	3,000
2·01-3·00	3,500	5,500
3·01-4·00	6,500	9,500
4·01-5·00	8,000	9,500
5·01-6·00	11,000	11,500
6·01-7·00	14,000	14,000
7·01-8·00	15,000	11,500
8·01-9·00	16,500	10,000
9·01-10·00	16,000	10,000
10·01-11·00	11,500	9,500
11·01-12·00	10,000	8,500
12·01-13·00	7,000	5,000
13·01-14·00	5,500	6,500
14·01-15·00	2,500	4,000
15·01-16·00	1,500	3,000
16·01-17·00	1,000	2,000
17·01-18·00	1,000	2,500
18·01-19·00	500	1,500
19·01-20·00	500	1,000
[3]20-01-24·00	500	3,500
24·01-30·00	[3*]	1,000
30·01 and over	Nil	Nil
Total	[4]13,400	131,500

[1] Deductions cover the cost of current consumption and where necessary, a specific amount to clear an outstanding bill. Number of cases have been rounded to nearest 500.
[2] Data for 1990 are not yet available.
[3] For figures over £20 per week the bands have been amalgamated as shown, since in single pound bands most would contain no cases or less than 500. The method by which these estimates are obtained does not imply a high level of precision for such numbers.
[4] Columns may not total to sum due to rounding.
[3*] Denotes figures under 500.
Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1989.

DEFENCE

Near Miss, Perranporth

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Royal Air Force Harrier involved in an air miss with a hang glider near Perranporth on 17 July 1986 was found to have made an unauthorised penetration of *(a)* the Perranporth aerodrome traffic zone and *(b)* the Penhale hang gliding site.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No, since *(a)* no report of an unauthorised penetration of the Perranporth aerodrome traffic zone was received; and *(b)* military aircraft are not prohibited from overflying the Penhale hang gliding site; they are advised only to keep a good lookout if flying in the area.

Air Misses

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations, aircraft involved, circumstances and heights of all category A air misses between civil and military aircraft in United Kingdom airspace during 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The following category A airmisses between civil and military aircraft occurred over the United Kingdom between January and June 1990. The joint air miss working group has not yet completed its assessments for the remainder of 1990.

Date involved	*Location*	*Aircraft*	*Circumstances*[1]	*Approximate height*
1 April 1990	Ballykelly	Cherokee/Gazelle	Late sighting by both pilots	2,300 ft.
11 April 1990	Tibenham	Rollason Condor/A10	Unauthorised penetration of Tibenham airfield area by A10 pilot	600 ft.
4 May 1990	22 NM[2] NE Flamborough Head	SK76 helicopter/untraced military jet	Conflict of flightpaths	3,000 ft.
8 May 1990	Barton Stacey	Gazelle/Cherokee	Failure of Cherokee pilot to see Gazelle in time to give way and very late sighting of Cherokee by Gazelle pilot	2,000 ft.

[1] Based on assessment by Joint Airmiss Working Group of cause of airmiss.
[2] NM—nautical miles.

Borders Tactical Training Area

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of retaining the separation of the borders tactical training area into two distinct parts.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The separation of the borders tactical training area into two distinct parts allows for more efficient management of the airspace by permitting simultaneous use of the eastern and western parts by two different units, should this be needed.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers Her Majesty's Government have to take disciplinary action against pilots of allied air forces who are found to have breached low-flying regulations in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Her Majesty's Government have no disciplinary jursidiction over personnel of other air forces. If, however, personnel of a NATO member state based in the United Kingdom were to breach our low-flying regulations, legal jurisdiction for disciplinary proceeding would be dealt with under the NATO status of forces agreement and the Visiting Forces Act 1952. If personnel from another country not based in the United Kingdom were to breach these regulations, they would be dealt with under the arrangements contained in the memorandum of understanding with that particular country.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operational low-flying movements were authorised in the borders tactical training area on Saturday 11 August 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Ten.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been conducted by his Department on the impact of noise from low-flying aircraft on deer stalking activities.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the visits by aircraft from the 57 fighter interceptor squadron, United States air force, to RAF Leuchars on 16 to 19 July 1990; and what authorisation was given to these aircraft to carry out low flying over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There were no such visits.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when No. 4 Squadron Royal Air Force first commenced night low-level training on the Harrier GR7; and if he will list the countries in which such training has so far taken place.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. 4 Squadron Royal Air Force has not yet commenced night low-level training on the Harrier GR7.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying movements were authorised in the borders tactical training area in each month from the earliest available records to the latest available date; and if he will provide a breakdown of the figures from September 1989 onwards into movements in the eastern and western parts of the borders tactical training area.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The borders tactical training area was formally incorporated into the United Kingdom low-flying system in 1984. Low-flying movements authorised in the area in each month from January 1984 to December 1987 are as follows:

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
January	0	94	42	85
February	3	63	196	98
March	0	16	24	129
April	0	0	10	247
May	0	0	0	16
June	0	0	28	0
July	0	0	26	0
August	0	0	0	0
September	0	0	24	11
October	50	0	248	23
November	60	0	0	0
December	78	0	0	17

The number of low-flying movements authorised in the borders tactical training area in 1988 and 1989 were provided in the reply given to the hon. Member on 19 December 1990 at column *208*, and for the period January to October 1990 in the reply given on 3 December 1990 at column *48*.

The numbers of low-flying movements authorised in the eastern and western parts of the borders tactical training area since September 1989 are as follows:

Borders Tactical Training Area

	East	West
1989		
September	181	135
October	57	47
November	17	21
December	0	0
1990		
January	78	71
February	191	156
March	234	179
April	117	99
May	94	91
June	68	0
July	36	36
August	318	212
September	397	317
October	411	298
November	365	260
December	121	94

Territorial Army

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the Territorial Army have been enlisted for service in the Gulf or to replace regular soldiers deployed to the Gulf;

(2) how many of those members of the Territorial Army who have been enlisted for service in the Gulf or to replace regular soldiers deployed to the Gulf are in the Army medical services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: About 500 members of the Territorial Army have volunteered and been called out for service in the Gulf or to replace regular soldiers deployed to the Gulf. About 470 of them are medical specialists.

TA and Cadets

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the Territorial Army, Army cadets, Air Training Corps and sea cadets budgets was expended in the northern region year by year since 1985.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The percentage of Territorial Army, Army cadet force, Air Training Corps and sea cadets manpower and administration cost which can be separately identified as being spent in the northern region are:

Year	TA Percentage	ACF Percentage	ATC Percentage	Sea cadets Percentage
1985-86	7	9	5	13
1986-87	7	10	6	13
1987-88	6	8	6	13
1988-89	7	9	3	13
1989-90	7	9	3	13

The figures for the sea cadets reflect only the MOD-funded element, and do not include moneys provided by the Sea Cadet Association.

Recruits

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of new recruits into Her Majesty's armed forces, Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, come from the northern region year by year since 1985.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The percentage of new recruits into the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army and Royal Air Force recruited in the northern region during the financial years 1985-86 to 1989-90 is set out in the table. Applications for entry as officers are dealt with centrally and regional breakdowns cannot be produced.

United Kingdom servicemen and servicewomen recruitment United Kingdom total

Financial year	All services	Royal Navy	Royal Marines	Army	Royal Air Force
1985-86	28,749	3,645	1,010	18,321	5,773
1986-87	29,632	4,703	1,171	17,729	6,029
1987-88	29,956	4,682	933	19,189	5,152
1988-89	30,256	4,781	890	19,401	5,184
1989-90	32,399	4,945	1,017	19,778	6,659

United Kingdom servicemen and servicewomen recruitment Northern region
(Percentage of United Kingdom total shown in brackets)

Financial year	All services	Royal Navy	Royal Marines	Army	Royal Air Force
1985-86	2,680	332[1]	99	1,706	543
Per cent.	(9·3)	(9·1)	(9·8)	(9·3)	(9·4)
1986-87	2,721	383	110	1,688	540
Per cent.	(9·2)	(8·1)	(9·4)	(9·5)	(9·0)
1987-88	2,870	414	80	1,916	460
Per cent.	(9·6)	(8·8)	(8·6)	(10)	(8·9)
1988-89	2,830	451	80	1,801	498
Per cent.	(9·4)	(9·4)	(9·0)	(9·3)	(9·6)
1989-90	3,112	386	65	2,000	661
Per cent.	(9·6)	(7·8)	(6·4)	(10·1)	(9·9)

[1] Less QARNNS in 1985-86 as they were dealt with centrally.

Technology Exports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has any plans to inform companies involved in the manufacture and export of militarily sensitive technologies of their responsibilities when engaging in such export trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. Information and guidance on security export controls of strategic goods and technology are provided to United Kingdom exporters by the Department of Trade and Industry which is responsible for export licensing.

End-user Certificates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken by Her Majesty's Government to ensure that end-user certificates attached to arms exports and military technology sales are adhered to by importer states.

Mr. Alan Clark: Sole-use clauses in sales agreements are designed to ensure that British defence equipment is not transferred to third parties without the agreement of the British Government.

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures have been kept under review and my right hon. Friend has approved revised rules covering the use of lap-top computers.

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to introduce a Bill to acquire the common rights at Greenham Common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Crown Proceedings Act 1949

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give his best estimate of the number of prospective claims communicated to his Department and which were barred from action when section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1949 was in force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No central records were kept of such prospective claims prior to 1978. However, 805 claims have been recorded as being received since late 1978.

Gulf and Falklands Forces

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by month for the last three months the cost of maintaining *(a)* the Gulf forces and *(b)* the Falklands forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current full monthly operating cost of maintaining our forces in the Gulf and the Falklands for October, November and December 1990 is estimated to be as follows:

Area	*October £ million*	*November £ million*	*December £ million*
Gulf	60	70	110
Falklands	5	5	5

British Nuclear Test Veterans Association

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of representations have been made by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association and its members. As the Government have made clear on many occasions, we would be ready to pay compensation wherever the Crown's legal liability was established and where there was firm evidence to show that, on a balance of probabilities, ex-service personnel had suffered ill-health as a result of exposure to radiation during the course of their duties as members of the armed forces.

Journalists (Gulf)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many journalists are accredited to armed forces facilities in the Gulf; and what restrictions are placed on their broadcasting or relaying of stories.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 45 journalists are accredited to various British service units in the Gulf. In filing reports they are required to abide by published ground rules designed to protect the security and safety of allied forces. Where necessary, their reports may also be subject to vetting by military authorities to which they are attached.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 24 January 1991

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each training agency area the employment training training agents and training managers who have since the start of the programme *(a)* gone into liquidation, *(b)* not had contracts with the training agency renewed and *(c)* ceased to provide employment training for any other reason.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the latest available period, the number and proportion of employment training trainees who three months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job, *(b)* in a part-time job, *(c)* in a full-time education or training course, *(d)* employed in their own business, *(e)* in a jobclub, *(f)* unemployed and claiming benefit and *(g)* unemployed and not claiming benefit.

Mr. Jackson: The following table gives the proportions of trainees leaving employment training in the last 12-month period for which information is available and their destinations. Detailed numbers as requested are unavailable.

Employment Training
Destination of trainees leaving in period August 1989 to July 1990 (estimated)

Region	*Full-time job* per cent.	*Part-time job* per cent.	*Full-time Education/ Training* per cent.	*Self-employed* per cent.	*Jobclub* per cent.	*Unemployed claiming benefit* per cent.	*Unemployed not claiming benefit* per cent.	*Other* per cent.
South East	27	12	2	6	3	33	8	8
London	22	6	4	7	5	41	7	5
South West	26	8	2	10	4	35	6	8
West Midlands	26	7	3	3	4	45	5	8
East Midlands and Eastern	25	8	2	5	5	41	5	8
Yorkshire and Humberside	27	7	2	6	4	43	4	6
North West	26	7	2	7	5	43	4	6
Northern	27	6	2	3	5	46	5	6
Wales	25	7	2	8	4	40	6	7
Scotland	25	5	3	4	5	47	4	7
Great Britain	25	7	2	5	5	43	5	7

Source: Respondents to the Employment Training Follow-up Survey.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for each quarter since employment training was introduced the number of participants who *(a)* fell within the guarantee group and *(b)* fell within the aim group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of places available on the employment training scheme for each year of operation; and how many places were in urban programme and partnership areas.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, information is available on the estimated number of ET starts, as shown in the table:

	ET starts (GB)	*Percentage in inner cities*
September 1988-March 1989	238,600	42
April 1989-March 1990	430,600	39

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was Government spending on employment training at 1989 prices for each year of operation.

Mr. Jackson: The table shows expenditure on employment training for each year of its operation to date at 1989-90 constant prices.

	£ million
1988-89 (from 5 September 1988)	452
1989-90	1,097
1990-91 (to end December 1990)	675

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who is now responsible for recovering any overpayments that are made to people in receipt of the enterprise allowance scheme in areas covered by training and enterprise councils; in what circumstances recovery of overpayments will be sought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils are responsible for recovering overpaid moneys to people who are in receipt of the enterprise allowance in the areas they cover. Each training and enterprise council assumes this responsibility from the date it becomes operational.

The decision to take recovery action rests with the training and enterprise council.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the proportion of female part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1990 whose hourly earnings exclusive of overtime fell below *(a)* £3·10, *(b)* £3·40, *(c)* £4·00, *(d)* £4·60 and *(e)* £4·75.

Mr. Jackson: The estimated percentages of part-time adult female employees earning below specified amounts in the new earnings survey sample in April 1990 were:

Hourly earnings excluding overtime less than:	*Percentage*
£3·00	36
£3·20	44
£3·40	52
£4·00	69
£4·50	78
£5·00	83

Estimates of the percentage earning below £3·10, £4·60 and £4·75 are not available; the nearest available figures have been given. The figures relate to employees on adult rates whose earnings for the survey period were not affected by absence.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of male part-time workers in Great Britain in April 1990; and what was the proportion of those workers falling below the hourly earnings threshold of *(a)* £3·40, *(b)* £4·60 and *(c)* £4·75.

Mr. Jackson: There were an estimated 906,000 part-time male employees in employment in March 1990. The estimated percentages of part-time adult male employees earning below specified amounts in the new earnings survey sample in April 1990 were:

Hourly earnings[1]	*Per cent.*
£3·40	49
£4·60	72
£4·80	74

[1] Including overtime.

Estimates of the percentage earning below £4·75 are not available; the nearest available figures have been given. The figures relate to employees on adult rates whose earnings for the survey period were not affected by absence.

Training Agency

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a table of expenditure on the programmes run by the Training Agency in 1989-90, broken down by programme and cross-tabulated by standard regions, with Greater London shown as a separate region.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is shown in the table:

Training Agency Programme Expenditure 1989-90

Expenditure (£ million)

Region	*ET*	*Residual AT*	*YTS*	*BGT*	*SFS*	*EAS*	*BEP (Outside ET)*	*WRFE*	*TVEI*	*Total*
South East	31·21	1·65	74·55	1·56	0·41	12·55	0·45	19·22	26·57	168·17
London	46·11	3·54	38·78	1·80	0·20	14·82	1·06	14·28	12·27	132·86
South West	25·60	1·42	59·39	0·87	0·27	12·32	0·34	9·66	8·19	118·06
West Midlands	43·23	1·86	87·65	1·32	0·25	12·52	0·35	11·49	13·06	171·73
East Midlands	33·08	1·66	91·14	0·98	0·36	12·81	0·33	12·40	12·17	164·93
Yorks and Humberside	50·97	2·20	87·11	1·03	0·29	12·69	0·34	9·68	9·99	174·30
North West	56·11	3·65	120·94	1·70	0·52	19·75	0·83	15·38	13·80	232·68
Northern	42·10	1·31	69·44	1·01	0·21	7·72	0·24	4·51	9·07	135·61
Wales	32·74	1·75	50·75	0·47	—	8·95	0·20	5·31	7·50	107·67
Scotland	60·70	3·24	102·69	0·91	—	10·97	0·33	—	11·54	190·38
TNPU	109·30	—	181·34	—	—	—	—	—	—	290·64
RTC	7·37	1·75	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9·12
GB	538·52	24·03	963·78	11·65	2·51	125·10	4·47	101·93	124·16	1,896·15

Notes:

1. Expenditure excludes training allowances and other costs administered centrally.
2. The TECs and National Provider's Unit (TNPU) is based centrally and holds contracts for major companies who provide training throughout Great Britain.
3. Figures given for residual AT include Voluntary Projects Programme (VPP), Community Programme (CP) and New JTS.
4. Figures quoted are as at end March 1990 and some minor adjustments may have been made when the end year definite statistics were produced.
5. London is Greater London.

Youth Training

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what account he has taken of the representations on youth training funding for special needs young people, made to him by the Arthur Rank centre in its letter of 19 December 1990, in determining levels of such funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 23 January 1991]:* Decisions on the appropriate levels of funding for youth training providers are for local negotiation between the providers themselves and their local training and enterprise council.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Housing

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the public expenditure on housing as a percentage of gross domestic product in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Yeo: The figures given are for Great Britain. They are based on gross expenditure on housing including spending from receipts and expenditure on housing benefits:

Year	*Gross domestic product per cent.*
1980-81	2·7
1981-82	2·2
1982-83	2·3
1983-84	2·8
1984-85	2·8
1985-86	2·5
1986-87	2·4
1987-88	2·3
1988-89	2·1
1989-90	2·2

Sewage Disposal

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date the present method of dumping sewage into the sea will cease or be amended at Ilfracombe, Combe Martin and Lynmouth.

Mr. Baldry: The target date for completing improvement schemes for sewage discharges at Ilfracombe, Combe Martin and Lynmouth is end 1995.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his timetable for his review of local government finance and structure.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is conducting a thorough and fundamental review of local government functions, structure and finance to identify a stable basis for the future development of local government. It is premature to say when it might be complete.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for 1990-91 for each local authority *(a)* the total amount of national non-domestic rate income to be collected, *(b)* his best estimate of the amount collected thus far and *(c)* the amount of national non-domestic rate income being made available to each authority in 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo: I am arranging for copies of the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the personal community charge payable in 1991-92 by each couple eligible for the community charge reduction scheme where the personal charge for 1990-91 was £350, and that for 1991-92 was £390, and where the total domestic rates paid by the household in 1989-90 was *(a)* £225, *(b)* £325, *(c)* £375 and *(d)* £275.

Mr. Key: In general, assuming that the couple did not benefit from or contribute to the safety net in 1990-91, the amount payable by each partner in 1991-92 would be as follows: *(a)* £204·50, *(b)* £254·50, *(c)* £279·50 and *(d)* £229·50.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to use a de minimis rule on the operation of community charge capping in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend will decide whether to adopt a de minimis proviso and the figure for any such proviso in making his designation decisions under section 100 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. As we have made clear local authorities should not assume that there will be such a proviso.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish his final criteria for the purposes of community charge-capping designation in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend intends to take his designation decisions under section 100 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as soon as reasonably practicable after authorities have set their budgets for 1991-92.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the qualifying date relating to residence in a property for eligibility for the community charge reduction scheme in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: Broadly, as with the current transitional relief scheme, a person may be eligible if he or she was subject to a personal community charge by virtue of residence in the relevant property on 31 March 1990.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the maximum number of assumed poll tax charges that will be used per household for the purposes of calculating help under the community charge reduction scheme in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: As with the current transitional relief scheme, two community charges will be used in the calculation of a reduction where there are two or more eligible charge payers in a property. However, special rules will apply to residents of sheltered housing schemes who will be able to qualify for a reduction in their own right.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assumption of population mobility for 1990-91 and 1991-92 he used for the purposes of calculating the numbers of poll tax payers likely to qualify for help under his proposed community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Portillo: A depletion rate of 10 per cent. per annum has been assumed in arriving at the estimates for the community charge reduction scheme, to allow for cessation of entitlement for charge payers who have moved or have died.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table of expenditure on the urban programme 1989-90 showing expenditure broken down into economic, environmental and social categories and cross-tabulated by standards, region, with Greater London shown as a separate region.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* Approved urban programme expenditure levels for 1989-90 for economic, environmental and social categories are shown below. The urban programme regions are cross-referenced to standard regions.

Urban programme region (£ million)

	Economic	*Environmental*	*Social*
Northern	21·006	5·656	9·695
Northwest[1]	21·452	5·577	9·010
Merseyside[1]	14·163	7·698	6·466
West Midlands	19·828	5·665	10·925
East Midlands	4·994	2·157	3·405
Yorkshire and Humberside	13·521	4·917	4·671
Southwest	0·998	0·499	0·689
London	24·416	13·270	11·147

[1] These two urban programme regions form one standard Northwest region. All other urban programme and standard regions are identical.

North Devon Coast

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the cause and the content of the layers of brown, greasy material that coat areas of the sea bed off the coast of north Devon.

Mr. Baldry: I have no information on any unnatural or unusual materials coating the sea bed off the coast of north Devon.

HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the current staff complement of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and how many staff will be in post by the end of the current financial year;

(2) how many inspectors and how many administrative staff are employed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and what the numbers are expected to be for the next financial year;

(3) how many staff will ultimately be required to enforce integrated pollution control.

Mr. Trippier: There are currently 220 staff in post in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP)—115 professional and 105 administrative staff.

The approved complement for the end of the current financial year has recently been increased from 223 to 248, and the approved complement for the end of 1991-92 to over 300. HMIP will therefore continue to recruit and expand during 1991-92.

Thereafter, complement may need to be increased further as IPC is progressively implemented and HMIP's workload increases further. Provisional assessments suggest that HMIP may ultimately require a total staff of up to around 400 when IPC is in full operation, but these assessments are subject to practical experience of operating IPC and are being kept under review.

When HMIP was formed in April 1987 from the merger of three previous inspectorates, there were 133 staff in post. The substantial increase in HMIP's strength demonstrates the Government's commitment to the highest standards of environmental protection.

Recruitment of further pollution inspectors is now in progress. Salary scales have been increased by 18 per cent., and this has overcome the recruitment difficulties previously experienced. The competition currently in progress has attracted nearly 600 good-quality applicants, showing a very encouraging level of interest among scientists in joining the inspectorate and being involved in its work of protecting the environment.

The table shows the detailed complement and staff-in-post figures for HMIP since its formation in April 1987.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution staffing[1]

	1 April 1987[2]	*1 January 1991*	*1 April 1991*	*1 April 1992*
Complement	199	223	248	[3]300-310
Staff in post	133	220	—	—

[1] All figures exclude the former Radioactive Waste Policy and Administrative Division, (25 administrative, two professional staff) which transferred from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution to the DOE Directorate of Pollution Control and Waste in November 1990.

[2] Date of formation of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution.

[3] Provisional figures.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he is satisfied that the price being agreed for the sale of the Crown Suppliers transport section fully reflects alternative uses of all five sites which form part of the sale;

(2) whether the sale of the five land sites belonging to the Crown Suppliers transport section provides for a valuation based on existing use value, planning hope value, or a valuation based on approved planning applications following the completion of any sale.

Mr. Yeo: The Government are concerned to ensure that they obtain a fair price for the business, having regard, among other things, to the market value of the assets, including the land. To this end independent professional valuations of the freehold sites have been obtained.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy not to permit control of the transport section of the Crown Suppliers to be varied prior to the payment of moneys by the management buy-out for the transport section of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State will retain control of the transport business of the Crown Suppliers in the run-up to any sale.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date Mr. Bill Pinkney first approached the Crown Suppliers or his Department directly with an offer to purchase the Crown Suppliers transport section.

Mr. Yeo: In April 1989.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what moneys have been allocated, paid or contracted for payment to the management buy-out for the Crown Suppliers transport section connected to Mr. Bill Pinkney and Mr. Bramall of Dewsbury.

Mr. Yeo: A total of £36,000 has been paid in support of professional fees incurred by a team lead by Mr. Pinkney. Provisional agreement has been reached to provide additional support of up to a further £111,000, subject to certain conditions being met. No commmitment to this further amount has so far been given. If Mr. Pinkney's team were successful in acquiring the business, the new company would have to repay all Government support.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will make a statement as to the investigation carried out by the Property Services Agency audit section into the activities of Mr. Bill Pinkney;

(2) whether he will list the actions taken by Mr. Bill Pinkney which led to an investigation being carried out by the Property Services Agency audit section.

Mr. Yeo: An audit of travel and subsistence, and certain other expenditure in the Crown Suppliers, including the transport business in which Mr. Pinkney is employed, has been undertaken by the Property Services Agency internal audit. The Crown Suppliers management have considered and are following up the matters arising from that audit.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the value of the orginal bid in cash terms submitted by the management buy-out led by Mr. Bill Pinkney for the transport section of the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Yeo: It would not be in the interests of a successful sale to reveal at this stage the details of any bids for the business.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he took to satisfy himself that the offer to purchase the Crown Suppliers transport section by a group of persons led by Mr. Bill Pinkney is a valid management buy-out initiative.

Mr. Yeo: The members of the team, the sources of finance, control and structure of the proposed new company will be included in the factors to be taken into account in assessing their bid for the business.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what values have been placed on the five sites comprising the property portfolio which forms part of the assets of the Crown Suppliers transport section.

Mr. Yeo: The market values of the three freehold sites in 1989 were as follows:

	£ million
Nine Elms, London	1·5
Burnett, Bristol	0·7
Biggleswade	1·5
Total	3·7

The leasehold sites are not considered to have any realisable value.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any Minister in his Department or their officials have met Mr. Bramall of Dewsbury to discuss the privatisation of the Crown Suppliers transport section.

Mr. Yeo: Yes.

Housing, Hyndburn

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in Hyndburn are classified as unfit.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information on unfit dwellings relates to 1 April 1990 and was provided by Hyndburn borough council in their April 1990 housing investment programme return (HIP 1), a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of housing investment programme allocation made to Hyndburn borough council for each year from 1978-79 up to the present time.

Mr. Yeo: Details of the allocations made to Hyndburn borough council since 1978-79 are listed in the table. Since 1981-82 authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their housing investment programme allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts. For 1990-91 and 1991-92, under the new capital finance system, the housing investment programme allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly.

Housing investment programme allocations for Hyndburn borough council

	£ thousands
1978-79	2,210
1979-80	2,388
1980-81	2,358
1981-82	3,600
1982-83	4,350
1983-84	3,390
1984-85	3,675
1985-86	3,315
1986-87	3,375
1987-88	3,870
1988-89	3,599
1989-90	5,401
1990-91	[1]4,386
1991-92	[2]3,525

[1] Provisional.
[2] Initial allocation only.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the housing investment programme for Hyndburn to take account of the number of unfit houses in Hyndburn.

Mr. Yeo: No. Account was taken of all relevant factors, including the likely demand for renovation grants arising from unfit housing, in determining Hyndburn's housing investment programme allocation for 1991-92.

Her Majesty's Prison, Belmarsh

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what delays there have been in the Property Services Agency paying sub-contractors for work carried out on the construction of Her Majesty's prison, Belmarsh; and if he will take steps to ensure that the outstanding sums are now paid.

Mr. Yeo: Payments to sub-contractors who have worked on the construction of Her Majesty's prison, Belmarsh are the responsibility of the management contractor.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each enterprise zone, the number of *(a)* new businesess created, *(b)* jobs created, *(c)* business bankruptcies and *(d)* jobs lost in each year since the creation of each enterprise zone.

Mr. Portillo: The latest published information on new businesses and jobs is included in the Department's report "Enterprise Zone Information 1987-88", a copy of which is in the Library. Information for 1988-89 will be available shortly. Data on business bankruptcies and jobs lost in each year are not collected.

Building Regulations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the changes proposed in his Department's amendments to approved document B of the Building Regulations (England and Wales) will affect levels of life safety.

Mr. Yeo: The consultation proposals for amendments to part B, "Safety in Fire" of the Building Regulations 1985 incorporate a number of provisions to improve levels of life safety. These include the new requirements relating to access and facilities for the fire service, the extension of the means of escape requirements and the proposals relating to smoke alarms in dwellings. A number of those who have commented have suggested that other proposals, such as those relating to the reduction of fire resistance periods, reduce levels of life safety, and these comments are being carefully examined by the fire advisory panel and the building regulations advisory committee.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the effect that the larger compartment sizes proposed in his Department's amendments to approved document B of the Building Regulations (England and Wales) will have on means of escape planning and the evacuation of a building in the event of fire with particular regard to maximum travel distances.

Mr. Yeo: The consultation proposals for amendments to part B, "Safety in Fire", of the Building Regulations 1985 incorporate detailed practical guidance relating to means of escape, including the provision and protection of escape routes, and maximum travel distances for escape purposes. This guidance is not affected by the proposals relating to compartmentation, as maximum travel distances are measured to a protected escape route or final exit, regardless of compartment size.

Housing

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the new role of local authorities as housing enabling authorities under the Housing Act 1988;

(2) how local authorities will fulfil their statutory responsibilities under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 in their enabling role under the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities have been acting as enablers for many years—although often in a small way. The new emphasis on local authorities acting as enablers rather than direct providers of subsidised housing parallels the expansion of the housing association movement. Housing associations are becoming the principal providers of new subsidised housing. Local authorities can fulfil their duties under the homelessness legislation by placing those they accept as homeless in their own dwellings; by using nomination arrangements to place them in dwellings owned by housing associations; or through similar arrangements made with other providers.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest evidence he has on changes in the level of private rented accommodation arising from the implementation of the Housing Act 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: There is a significant anecdotal evidence of an increase in the amount of property available for new lettings in the private rented sector. We have a survey in hand which will provide firmer evidence, the results of which should be available within the next two to three months.

Large Combustion Plants

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue his formal plan for reducing sulphur dioxide and NOx emissions from existing large combustion plants.

Mr. Trippier: The United Kingdom's programme and national plan for reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen from existing large combustion plants was published on 20 December. Notice of the making of the plan was given in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazette. Copies have been laid in the Libraries of both Houses and are also available from my Department.

Long Sea Outfalls

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of disposal of leachate from landfill sites through long sea outfalls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: It is for the NRA to set conditions on discharges through long sea outfalls.

Ministerial Responsibility

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all those Ministers who have been given a specific responsibility for environmental matters within their respective departmental portfolios.

Mr. Heseltine: I am responsible, supported by my ministerial colleagues, for all environmental matters within my Department's remit. The current list of Ministers nominated to be responsible for considering the environmental implications of all their Department's policies and spending programmes and for following up the relevant parts of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm. 1200) is as follows:

Department and Minister
Lord Chancellor
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mackay of Clashfern
Environment
The Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP
Transport
The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind, QC, MP
Energy
The Rt. Hon. John Wakeham, MP
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
The Rt. Hon. John Gummer, MP
Trade and Industry
The Rt. Hon. Peter Lilley, MP
Law Officers'
The Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Lyell, QC, MP
Privy Council Office/Office of Arts and Libraries
The Rt. Hon. Tim Renton, MP
Overseas Development
The Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker, MP
Home Office
The Rt. Hon. Angela Rumbold, CBE, MP
Treasury
Mrs. Gillian Shephard, MP
Defence
Kenneth Carlisle, Esq., MP
Education and Science
Michael Fallon, Esq., MP
Employment
Eric Forth, Esq., MP
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
The Hon. Mark Lennox-Boyd, MP
Health
Stephen Dorrell, Esq., MP
Northern Ireland Office
Richard Needham, Esq., MP
Scottish Office
The Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, MP
Social Security
The Lord Henley

Local Government

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a list of statutory bodies set up to carry out successor functions of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties, showing the expenditure of each successor body in 1989-90 and the principal sources of income of each successor body.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Interest Rate Swaps

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement in the light of the House of Lords' judgment on local authority interest rate swaps.

Mr. Heseltine: The House of Lords' judgment concerns local authorities' powers to undertake interest rate swaps and similar business. The Government are considering the implications of the judgment.

The statutory powers of local authorities to borrow money, and the protection provided by legislation to those who lend to local authorities, were not in issue in the Hammersmith and Fulham case. The legislation provides that a person lending money to a local authority does not have to ask whether the authority has power to borrow the money and the lender is entitled to repayment of the loan, together with any interest thereon, regardless of whether the borrowing was within the authority's power or not.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the occasions, within the last 12 months, when a London Underground station has been evacuated, or closed for a period exceeding 10 minutes, listing *(a)* the length of time the station was closed or evacuated, *(b)* the reason for the closure or evacuation and *(c)* whether the closure or evacuation took place during the peak period.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not kept by my Department. It is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd.

Public Bodies

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those bodies to which he makes appointments, giving the number of people whom he appoints to each body.

Mr. Rifkind: The majority of the appointments for which I am responsible are listed in either "Public Bodies 1990" published by HMSO or "Women into Public Appointments" produced by the Women's National Commission, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The appointments which are not listed in either document are:
Acting conservator of the River Mersey;
Four delegates to the Central Rhine Commission;
Chairman and six members of the honorary medical advisory panel on driving and diabetes;
Chairman and five members of the honorary medical advisory panel on driving and disorders of the cardiovascular system;
Chairman and eight members of the honorary medical advisory panel for driving and disorders of the nervous system and chairman and two members of the panel's sub-committee on mental health drug and alcohol misuse.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since 1983, the Energy Efficiency Office (EEO) has promoted a range of programmes and other services to encourage the adoption of cost-effective energy efficiency measures in industry and the domestic sector. These initiatives have led to recurrent annual energy savings now worth over £500 million a year and currently include:

the ministerial group on energy efficiency which aims to promote awareness and raise the profile of energy efficiency; encourage an energy efficiency lifestyle at home, at work and in transport; and lead by example in the development of policy initiatives and by taking forward the energy efficiency campaign on the Government estate and in other public sector bodies;

the best practice programme which provides independent and authoritative advice and information on energy use and efficiency in industry and commerce, and in the public sector and in housing; the programme will continue to promote combined heat and power;

regional energy efficiency officers who lead the drive to encourage energy efficiency by visiting main energy users to guide them in developing energy management programmes, promoting EEO programmes and energy efficiency seminars and exhibitions, and encouraging the energy efficiency industry;

in the domestic sector, the home energy efficiency scheme, which began on 1 January 1991, replacing the community insulation programme which has insulated some 850,000 homes; it will offer grants towards the cost of basic energy efficiency measures in low-income households; the EEO has also launched a new domestic advertising campaign to motivate those moving house or improving their homes to improve their energy efficiency; This campaign is supported by a new information pack —"Energy in Your Home"—which provides information and advice on a wide range of measures.

The EEO is also carrying forward a number of new initiatives which were announced in the White Paper on the Environment, "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200), and which include:

developing proposals for a new scheme of project management assistance for implementation of energy efficiency investments;

considering with the lighting industry how to overcome barriers to the uptake of high-efficiency lighting;

pursuing appliance labelling and minimum standards with our own appliance industry and in the EC.

With regard to the Department of Energy's own energy use, during the first year of occupation in our new headquarters building, which incorporates energy-efficiency systems, major energy initiatives were precluded by the process of ensuring that all plant and equipment were operating correctly and efficiently. However, during the coming year, my officials together with those of Property Holdings, will be investigating the feasibility of a contract energy management package. In addition, my Department will be running year-long schemes designed to promote staff awareness of the importance of energy efficiency through a variety of means including leaflets, poster campaigns and staff suggestions schemes.

Orimulsion

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he has received approaches seeking consent by National Power for the use of Orimulsion in any of their power stations:

(2) if he has received approaches seeking the consent by Power Gen for the use of Orimulsion in any of their power stations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration he has given to the postponement of the flotation of National Power and PowerGen until after the cessation of hostilities in the middle east.

Mr. Wakeham: Preparations for the flotation of National Power and PowerGen are proceeding to timetable. Subject to market conditions, I intend to float both companies next month.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the present plans and timetable for the installation of flue gas desulphurisation equipment at Ferrybridge and Ratcliffe power stations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: PowerGen has submitted applications for consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to install flue gas desulphurisation equipment at its Ratcliffe-on-Soar and Ferrybridge C power stations. These applications are under consideration.

WALES

Bristol Channel (Pollution)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what date Welsh Water will cease the dumping of sewage sludge into the Bristol channel; and what quantities were disposed of by this method in the latest two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The sea disposal of sewage sludge is to be terminated as soon as possible and by 31 December 1998 at the latest. Welsh Water is preparing plans to meet this requirement. The amount of sewage sludge deposited by Welsh Water in the last two years for which figures are available is as follows:

Thousand tonnes (wet weight)

1988	*1989*
55	62

Community Charge

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give his estimate of the community charge for 1991-92, including precepts for each of the district councils in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The level of community charges for 1991-92 will depend on the spending decisions of each local authority. If counties and districts spend in line with the realistic settlement that my right hon. Friend announced to the House on 17 January the average community charge component for each tier should be around £190 and £38 respectively, giving a combined community charge for standard spending of £228. The average community charge payable should not exceed £200 after allowing for the £62 million which the Government has provided for the community charge reduction scheme. This is £23 lower than the average actual charge for 1990-91 after relief, and is eminently achievable.

Irradiated Food

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure the adequate protection of the public in respect of irradiated food in Wales since last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Regulations permitting the irradiation of food came into operation on 1 January this year. The regulations incorporate a strict control framework both in respect of the licensing of food irradiation premises, and in respect of the categories of food which may be subjected to irradiation. Additionally, official recognition is needed for the use of the process in connection with imported foodstuffs.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss Wales's share of inward investment projects going to United Kingdom assisted areas.

Mr. David Hunt: I have regular discussions with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency about a range of matters concerning the development of the Welsh economy, including inward investment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crawfordsburn Hospital

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations have taken place about the closure and subsequent disposal of Crawfordsburn hospital between the Eastern health and social services board and the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Hanley: The Eastern health and social services board first sought the approval of the Department of Health and Social Services to the closure of Crawfordsburn hospital in September 1987. A further submission was made to the Department in September 1990 and formal approval to the closure was conveyed to the board on 25 October. No consultations between the board and the Department about disposal of the property have so far taken place.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the future of Crawfordsburn hospital was first discussed at a meeting of the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: A proposal to close Crawfordsburn hospital was first discussed by the Eastern health and social services board at its meeting on 26 March 1987.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will consider the conversion of Crawfordsburn hospital and its grounds into a retirement village for the elderly of North Down.

Mr. Hanley: The future use of Crawfordsburn hospital is a matter for the Eastern health and social services board in the first instance. Decisions about the disposal of the hospital will be taken in the light of any proposals put forward by the Board for its future use.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the future of Crawfordsburn hospital was discussed at a meeting of the North Down and Ards unit of management of the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: The future of Crawfordsburn hospital was first discussed by the then North Down and Ards district executive team in August 1982.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the owners of the Bryansburn Inn in Bangor were first notified by the eastern health and social services board that Crawfordsburn hospital was to be closed.

Mr. Hanley: A document containing proposals for the closure of Crawfordsburn hospital was issued for public consultation by the Eastern health and social services board in March 1987. I am not aware of any contact between the Eastern board and the owners of the Bryansburn Inn about the future of the hospital.

Hospitals

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans to reduce the concentration of hospital provision in west Belfast so as to achieve more equitable provision over the province as a whole.

Mr. Hanley: Responsibility for the provision of hospital services in Northern Ireland lies in the first instance with the four health and social services boards acting within the regional strategic guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Social Services. I am aware that the Eastern board is at present developing a strategic approach to the delivery of acute hospital services to its population, but so far no firm proposals have been put to the Department for approval.

Health Service Funding

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated amount of funding that goes directly to the Eastern health board area for the treatment of residents of other board areas.

Mr. Hanley: Under the present arrangements, resources are allocated to health and social services boards on the basis of the levels of service provided by each board. Resources are not specifically earmarked or identified in the Eastern board's allocation for the provision of services to the residents of other board areas.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide an estimate for the total Government expenditure on the upkeep, care and protection of historic buildings and monuments in Northern Ireland in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Needham: Estimated expenditure for 1990-91 is £4,664,000 and for 1991-92 is £5,028,000.

Director and Co-ordinator of Intelligence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement as to the present duties and activities of the present Director and Co-ordinator of Intelligence for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: It is not my practice, nor has it been that of successive Governments, to comment on such matters.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to apply the non-fossil fuel obligation to Northern Ireland; and what size tranche of renewable power he expects to grant.

Mr. Needham: The Electricity Act 1989, which contains the powers relating to the non-fossil fuel obligation, does not extend to Northern Ireland.

Disability

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the work force in Northern Ireland is registered disabled.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 14 January 1991]:* About 1 per cent.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Sector Manpower

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much manpower in the whole of the public sector has changed between 1978-79 and 1988-89; by how much civil service manpower has changed between those dates; what would have been the changes in manpower for the whole of the public sector if it had changed at the same rate as civil service manpower; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information is as follows:

	Thousands			
	1978-79	*1988-89*	*change*	*percentage*
Public sector manpower: total	6,565	5,361	−1,204	−18·3
Civil Service manpower: total	734	572	−162	−22·1

Source: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cm 1021): chapter 21, appendix D.

Had public sector manpower changed at the same rate as civil service manpower, it would have fallen by 1,449 thousand.

Civil Service Posts, Renfrew

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to locate additional permanent civil service posts in Renfrew district.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government's relocation policy is not centrally directed. But I would refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the then Paymaster General gave on 25 October 1990, columns *303-5*, to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), which listed civil service posts located or relocated out of the south-east since 1979 together with the relocation plans announced by Departments but still to be implemented.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what poll tax figures he used for the purposes of calculating the retail prices index in 1990-91; and if he intends to make any change in 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: In 1990-91 the average community charge figures used in the retail prices index were:

	£
England	357
Wales	233
Scotland	306

The same principles will be followed for the purpose of calculating the RPI 1991-92 as were applied in 1990-91.

Redundancy Payments

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the transfer of employees of state enterprise which have been privatised, if he will list *(a)* those where there has not been any reduction in public service redundancy payments compared with those they would have received if they had remained in the public service and *(b)* those where there has been any such reduction.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, civil servants transferred to a new employer on privatisation are entitled to redundancy compensation, which is identical to that available under the principal civil service pension scheme. The question of reduction in redundancy compensation therefore does not arise.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of redundancy payments to *(a)* a civil service employee and *(b)* an employee of a normal commercial undertaking.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 requires employers to make redundancy payments. The Act does not apply to the civil service. However, arrangements have been made to ensure that redundancy payments to civil servants are at least comparable with the requirements of the Act and, in common with other good employers, the civil service provides payments which are in almost all cases more favourable than those requirements. The compensation terms are set out in section 10 of the principal civil service pension scheme.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Rihand Power Station, India

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the terms of reference of the World bank environmental assessment of the area around the Rihand power station in India.

Mrs. Chalker: The environmental assessment of the Singrauli area, which includes the Rihand power station, is being conducted under terms of reference agreed between the World bank and the Government of India, which are not in the public domain. We are, however, satisfied from our discussions with both parties that the study will be wide-ranging and comprehensive.

Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations he is making for the United Nations 1992 conference on environment and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 10 December 1990, c. *283*.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has actively encouraged local education authorities to conserve energy in educational buildings. Savings have been achieved by supporting development projects, dissemination of guidance on good practice and commissioned research. LEAs are currently spending £43 million a year less in real terms on energy than they did in 1978-79.

Current initiatives include supporting work being undertaken by the building research energy conservation support unit (BRECSU) in connection with its four-year £1 million programme to save energy in schools. DES publications offering advice on how to make energy savings are also in the course of preparation.

Regarding DES buildings, a sum of £10,000 was spent on power factor correction equipment at its Darlington headquarters offices in the 1989-90 financial year. This built on a sum of £28,000 spent on electrical lighting control sensors at the same site in the previous financial year. Expenditure on energy-saving equipment at the Department's London HQ cannot be justified as insufficient time remains in which to recover capital outlay prior to a move to new premises. A building management system has been specified as an energy-saving measure for the Department's new building which is in the course of construction.

Complete statistics are not available to enable us to say by what amount and by what percentage the Department's total energy bill has been reduced over the past year, but our target savings for the 1990-91 financial year are 3 per cent. compared with the previous financial year.

Rodent Carcases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* all methods of disposal used by the Medical Research Council for irradiated rodent carcases since such disposals have been required following research; and what current licensing arrangements exist for disposal.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The disposal routes for such carcases used by the Medical Research Council are:

1. Maceration followed by disposal to the sewer, or,
2. Incineration and landfill.

The disposal of irradiated rodent carcases is subject to authorisation by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. Authorisations are issued only after careful assessment of the environmental impact of the proposed disposals.

Bomb Scares

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice is given to local education authorities and to governors of *(a)* local education authority maintained schools, *(b)* grant-maintained schools, *(c)* local education authority maintained colleges and *(d)* colleges of higher education and polytechnics about how the staff of these institutions should be involved with the police when searching for explosive material during a bomb scare.

Mr. Eggar: No advice is given by the Department on how to deal with local emergencies. The police, who should be the first point of contact in the event of an emergency, will give all necessary advice.

Special Educational Needs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice the Government have given to governors of grant-maintained schools regarding support for, and integration of, children with special educational needs.

Mr. Fallon: Such advice is contained in "Guide to the Law for Grant-Maintained School Governors" issued in September 1989, in DES circular 10/88 "Education Reform Act 1988: Grant-Maintained Schools" and in DES circular 21/89 "Grant-Maintained Schools: Financial Arrangements". Governors of grant-maintained schools will also receive copies of other relevant guidance such as the recently issued DES circular 11/90—"Staffing for Pupils with Special Educational Needs".

Reading Standards

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* all national surveys of reading standards conducted in the last 10 years which his Department has available, with dates of survey and publication, and the sponsor and executor of the research in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Much of the available information about reading standards in the 1980s derives from surveys conducted by individual local education authorities. However, the following national surveys are also available:

The results of the assessment of performance unit's annual surveys of reading at age 11 and 15 during the years 1979-1983, published in summary form in 1988 in "Language Performance in Schools—Review of APU monitoring 1979-1983". The APU was sponsored jointly by the DES, Welsh Office and Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

An HMI inspection report on "Reading Policy and Practice at ages 5-14" based on a survey of primary and secondary schools in 1989 and published the same year.

An HMI report on "The Teaching and Learning of Reading in Primary Schools" based on a survey of primary schools in autumn 1990 and other inspection evidence and published in 1991.

A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research entitled "An Enquiry into LEA Evidence on Standards of Reading of Seven Year Old Children" based on information about reading standards among seven-year-olds during the 1980s submitted to the NFER by local education authorities. The work was sponsored by the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) at the request of my predecessor.

History Teaching

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the principal differences between the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council relating to history and his proposals now the subject of consultation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The principal differences between the draft order for history, published on 14 January, and the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council relating to history, are set out in the table. The programme of study for key stage 4 and certain of the non-statutory examples illustrating the attainment targets have been adjusted to focus on the first half of the 20th century, with references to events from the turn of the century to the 1960s. These changes reflect my view that the law should not require teaching about particular contemporary events and people as part of the national curriculum history syllabus because of the difficulty of treating such matters with an historical perspective.

Summary of main changes

Programme of study for key stage 4	*Page number of (a) NCC report (b) draft order*
The preamble to key stage 4 model 1 indicates a focus on events from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1960s	*(a)* 56 *(b)* 36
Sub-sections on "British Democracy" and "International Conflict and Co-operation" now specify study should be up to circa 1960	*(a)* 59 *(b)* 39
The supplementary study units in model 2 changed to set terms to the periods of study as follows:	*(a)* 63 *(b)* 42
—Russia and USSR 1905-1964	
—The United States of America 1917-1963	
—The Indian sub-continent 1914-1964	
—Africa south of the Sahara 1900-1963	
—The Middle East 1914-1967	
—Latin America 1910-1962	
—Japan 1904-mid 1960s	
—China 1911-1966	

In addition, the draft order includes a number of complementary changes to the non-statutory examples which will accompany the order but which do not form part of the national curriculum requirements.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he proposes to lay orders relating to the national curriculum, history.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In March 1991.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received the latest report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions; and when he expects to publish it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I received the report on 18 January and will publish it shortly.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he proposes that the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions should be fully funded.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Funding for teachers' salaries for 1991-92 was settled when the Government announced increased education standard spending for that year. The increase took full account of the remit given to the interim advisory committee and would fund recommendations within that remit.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *25-26*, what guidance he has given to local education authorities as to the maximum percentage of their budgets to be applied to the funding of city technology colleges.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has given no such guidance.

Science Budget

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the distribution of the science budget for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have considered the recommendations of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the distribution of the science budget, and have decided to accept the board's advice that the £920·8 million for 1991-92 should, subject to approval by Parliament of the estimates in due course, be allocated as follows:

Allocations for 1991-92	*£ million*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	93·47
Economic and Social Research Council	35·51
Medical Research Council	200·42
Natural Environment Research Council	122·56
Science and Engineering Research Council	451·30
The Royal Society	15·74
The Fellowship of Engineering	1·39
ABRC (Secretariat and Science Policy Studies)	0·36
Centre for Exploitation of Science and Technology	0·08
TOTAL	920·83

I have also accepted the board's recommendation that for planning purposes the following indicative allocations should be adopted for the years 1992-93 and 1993-94:

Planned figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94

£ million

	1992-93	*1993-94*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	90·53	91·58
Economic and Social Research Council	37·24	37·71
Medical Research Council	206·35	208·80
Natural Environment Research Council	119·99	121·28
Science and Engineering Research Council	462·96	469·16
The Royal Society	15·77	15·97
The Fellowship of Engineering	1·44	1·46
Unallocated[1]	88·94	160·40

[1] Including £50 million (1992-93) and £100 million (1993-94) consequent on new arrangements for funding of scientific work in higher education institutions.

In making these allocations I have accepted the board's advice that additional provision of £4·1 million, £6 million and £6 million in each of the three years 1991-92 to 1993-94 should be made available to the Medical Research Council for the restructuring of clinical research through its clinical research initiative.

The indicative planning figures above contain an unallocated £39 million in 1992-93 and £60 million in

1993-94 on which I expect to receive further advice from the ABRC in the spring. The allocations to funded bodies also exclude the increases in the science budget of £50 million in 1992-93 and £100 million in 1993-94 to take account of the new arrangements for funding scientific research in higher education announced on 8 November, *Official Report*, columns *27-28*.

PRIME MINISTER

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy towards the establishment of a seat on the United Nations Security Council for a representative from the European Community in place of the United Kingdom and French representatives.

The Prime Minister: According to the charter of the United Nations, only states may be members of the Security Council.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals have been put to him relating to the relinquishing of the United Kingdom's seat in the Security Council.

The Prime Minister: No such proposals have been put to the British Government.

European Community

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to put proposals on the subsidiarity of powers between the European Community and United Kingdom national and local government to Parliament.

The Prime Minister: We have already made clear in the political union intergovernmental conference that, provided that an acceptable definition can be agreed, we want to see the principle of subsidiarity recognised and observed by the European Community.

Wealth

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will take urgent action to avoid negative redistribution of wealth between rich and poor in Britain.

The Prime Minister: Real personal sector wealth has increased by some 60 per cent. since 1979, while there has been little change in its overall distribution. Government policies will continue to promote a dynamic, wealth-creating economy.

Kurds

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will seek European Community and United Nations support for a homeland and state for the Kurdish people.

The Prime Minister: No. The United Kingdom is a signatory to the treaty of Lausanne of 1923 which established the present-day frontiers in the region bounded by Iran, Iraq and Turkey. There can be no question of our seeking support for the establishment of a separate Kurdish state within those boundaries.

United Nations Resolutions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government last pressed the European Community for initiatives to enforce United Nations resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1973.

The Prime Minister: We are in regular contact with our EC partners about the peace process and the role of the Twelve in it. Community policy on the issue was set out in the European Council's Venice declaration of 1980. This made clear, as have subsequent Council statements, most recently on 15 December 1990, that Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 should be the basis of any settlement.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister when he last discussed with Prime Minister Shamir the need to accept and abide by United Nations resolutions 242 and 338; and if he will make a statement on United Kingdom policy regarding the self-determination of the Palestinians and protection of the state of Israel.

The Prime Minister: I discussed the Arab-Israel peace process with Mr. Shamir during his visit to London last December. I reiterated the need for early progress towards a settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. This will need to match the Palestinians' right to self-determination with Israel's right to security.

British Muslims

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of the British Muslim community.

The Prime Minister: I have had no recent meeting, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, saw a group of Muslims for discussion on the Gulf situation on 18 January, and has also seen a group of Muslim journalists: further meetings are in prospect. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office met representatives of the United Kingdom action committee on Islamic affairs yesterday. Such meetings reflect continuing contacts at ministerial and official level.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines he has issued to British citizens in civilian employment in Saudi Arabia and their employers regarding conformity with civil air raid warnings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The British embassy in Riyadh has given written advice to British nationals in the eastern and central provinces of Saudi Arabia on precautions to be taken in the event of conflict. The embassy has also issued respirators and full instructions on their use in the event of an attack by chemical weapons. The embassy maintains close and continuing contact with the British community both directly and through the wardens.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with his opposite numbers in the United Nations coalition

of nations in the Gulf hostilities regarding the co-ordination of guidelines for civilian employees and employers in Saudi Arabia in responding to air raid warnings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have had frequent exchanges with the Governments of the coalition and other Governments about the protection of civilians in Saudi Arabia. The most important of these contacts have been with the Saudi Arabian Government, who are responsible for providing air raid shelters, instructions and air raid warnings.

Squid, South Atlantic

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to safeguard Illex squid stocks in the South Atlantic.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. We and the Falkland Islands Government are conscious of the need to conserve these stocks. As part of our efforts to do so we agreed recently with the Argentine Government measures to enhance fisheries conservation in the south-west Atlantic, including the establishment of a Falkland Islands outer conservation zone in which all fishing has been banned for one year beginning on 26 December 1990. An Anglo-Argentine joint commission on fisheries, at which information about and ideas on conservation will be discussed, will meet in March.

HEALTH

Mentally Ill People

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mentally ill people are *(a)* in long-stay mental health institutions, *(b)* in care in the community, *(c)* in prison and *(d)* homeless.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of mentally ill residents in national health service hospitals and units on 31 March 1990 who had been resident for more than one year is estimated at 31,200.

The precise number of mentally ill people in receipt of care in the community is not known. The number of people in homes and hostels for mentally ill people who are supported by local authorities under the provisions of schedule 8 to the National Health Service Act 1977, as at 31 March 1989, the latest available date, was 3,549.

The total number of prisoners who suffer from some form of mental illness is not recorded centrally. A total of 245 prisoners were reported by prison medical officers on 31 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, to be mentally ill within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983, to a degree to meet the criteria for detention in hospital set out in that Act. Annually over 1,000 prisoners are transferred from prison to hospital under the provisions of that Act following reports by prison medical officers.

The number of mentally ill people who are homeless is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any information on the staffing and management arrangements of mental nursing homes registered to take detained patients with particular reference to the responsibilities of such homes under the Mental Health Act 1983; and what plans he has to increase the information available on such mental nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: The numbers of registered mental nurses and registered nurses for the mentally handicapped in registered mental nursing homes are reported to the Department by district health authorities in return KO36. The figures for 31 March 1989 were 1,050 full-time and 714 part-time registered mental nurses and 142 full-time and 65 part-time registered nurses for the mentally handicapped. We have no plans to collect any other information on the staffing of mental nursing homes.

Registered mental nursing homes are subject to the Registered Homes Act 1984 and must meet the requirements of that Act before they can be registered. Homes registered to take patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 must comply with all the relevant sections of that Act, including those concerning patients' rights while detained and access to the mental health review tribunals and the Mental Health Act Commission. The responsibilities of managers of registered mental nursing homes under the 1983 Act are broadly comparable to those of managers of NHS hospitals.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of detained patients cared for in mental nursing homes during 1990; and how many mental nursing homes are registered to take detained patients.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available information is for 31 March 1989 when there were 89 patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 in private mental nursing homes in England. This does not include patients cared for under contractual arrangements with health authorities. On the same date there were 60 mental nursing homes registered under part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984 and authorised to detain patients.

Trent Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the number of hospital beds by district health authority in the Trent regional health authority *(a)* in 1979, *(b)* in 1985 and *(c)* for the latest date for which he has figures.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the tables.

Number of beds available in Trent regional health authority and district health authorities 1979, 1985, 1989-90

Years	*1979*	*1985*	*1989-90*
Regional total	31,711	29,391	24,554
North Derbyshire	1,722	1,749	1,574
South Derbyshire	4,208	3,535	2,700
Leicestershire	5,140	5,045	4,436
North Lincolnshire	2,815	2,110	1,413
South Lincolnshire	1,894	1,768	1,481
Bassetlaw	403	433	409
Central Nottinghamshire	1,997	1,794	1,484
Nottingham	4,198	3,931	3,334
Barnsley	962	1,134	1,111
Doncaster	1,808	1,879	1,657
Rotherham	1,331	1,251	1,129
Sheffield	5,233	4,771	3,828

Number of inpatients treated in Trent RHA and DHAs—1979, 1985, 1989-90

	Finished hospital stays (discharges and deaths)		*Finished consultant episodes*
	1979	*1985*	[1] *1989-90*
Trent regional health authority	464,917	578,370	698,776
North Derbyshire	22,989	28,185	37,345
Southern Derbyshire	47,540	53,724	61,608
Leicestershire	74,454	95,365	110,970
North Lincolnshire	25,751	29,279	36,600
South Lincolnshire	23,535	31,003	39,124
Bassetlaw	9,111	11,953	15,110
Central Nottinghamshire	32,095	36,472	43,221
Nottingham	73,992	97,291	117,018
Barnsley	21,449	27,512	32,908
Doncaster	28,103	39,936	47,926
Rotherham	27,805	30,727	38,380
Sheffield	78,093	96,923	118,566

[1] Figures for 1989-90 refer to finished consultant episodes and should not be directly compared with earlier figures (discharges and deaths).

In 1988-89 when data were collected on both bases, finished consultant episodes in Trent regional health authority exceeded discharges and deaths by 8 per cent.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service has met the target of reducing energy consumption by 1·5 per cent. a year suggested by the Public Accounts Committee in 1980-81 and there is a commitment to save a further 15 per cent. in consumption over the next five years.

Guidance is provided by the Department's "Encode" and the performance of regional health authorities is monitored by the national health service management executive.

It is estimated that £379 million has been saved in the national health service in the last 10 years due to reductions in energy consumption, changes in fuel prices and rationalisation of the estate. The latest annual figures which have been validated are for 1986-87 and they show a saving of £4·7 million representing 2 per cent. of the total energy bill for that year.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the name, address and telephone number of each national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given with regard to the charging by national health service trusts of local authority social services departments for services currently provided freely by local health authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No guidance is being given to trusts on systems for charging local authorities for services. The powers for national health service trusts to charge for services are no different from the powers which continue to be available to health authorities. Health services to individual patients remain free at the point of delivery. Local authorities remain responsible for determining charges to clients for social care which they arrange or provide.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy towards national health service trusts who may wish to make direct community care provision.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health service trusts can enter into contracts with district health authorities for the provision of any health service including community health services. National health service trusts may make direct community care provision for local authorities if they wish, bearing in mind that the funding of such provision is subject to section 7 of the Health and Medicines Act 1988.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made for national health service trusts to purchase the services of hospital-based local authority social workers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities will provide hospital social work services to national health service trusts on the same basis as to the rest of the hospital and community health services.

Dental Charges

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average dental charge in 1988-89 and in 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: The average dental charge in England for the financial year 1988-89 was £19·84. The figure for 1990-91 is not yet available.

British Sign Language

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which national health service district general hospitals in England and Wales provide British sign language interpreters for deaf people; and which charge for this service.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Food Safety

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made to ensure that United Kingdom food hygiene standards are maintained throughout the European Community.

Mr. Dorrell: Major changes are being introduced in England and Wales from 1 April to improve food hygiene by the appropriate use of temperature controls during production, distribution and sale. The controls apply to food whether produced in this country for consumption here or for export and to foods which have been imported. Different food hygiene requirements apply in individual member states of the European Community. Where the European Commission puts forward proposals for European standards the views of the United Kingdom Government are fully represented.

Young Offenders

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of local authorities have their own secure accommodation available for young people for whom it is judged necessary.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 31 December 1990, 26 local authorities, 24 per cent., in England provided secure accommodation. All local authorities have access to this national network of secure facilities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority secure places were made available to other local authorities willing to pay for them, in the last year for which figures were available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Of the 1,417 admissions to secure accommodation in England during the year ending 31 March 1989, 775 were placed by local authorities which did not provide such facilities; 11 were placed by local authorities outside England, and 60 were placed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority secure homes for young people have been closed in the last five years; and what proportion this is of the total at the beginning of the period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In January 1986 there were 46 community homes providing secure units. Ten (22 per cent.) of these units have since closed permanently, primarily because the associated open part of the home has become surplus to the requirements of the local authority. A further four such secure units are currently temporarily closed while the local authority reviews their long-term future.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from chief constables with regard to the availability of secure accommodation for young persons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There have been no representations from chief constables specifically about the availability of secure accommodation. The Department has received comments from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on the draft regulations and guidance on secure accommodation that were issued for consultation under the Children Act 1989. ACPO's comments will be taken into account when the final version of these regulations and guidance are prepared.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his estimate of the number of local authority care home trusts; and in which local authorities they are located.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to encourage the development of short-term respite care in both the local authority and the private sectors to avoid permanent admissions to care homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's White Paper "Caring for People" makes it clear that respite care has an important part to play in supporting carers and enabling dependent people to continue living in the community. The White Paper also asks local authorities to promote the involvement of and make maximum use of the non-statutory sector in improving community care.

The Department has awarded a grant to the National Association of Family Based Respite Care and has funded research at Bristol university about respite care for families with children with a mental handicap.

The report "Care for a Change", produced by the Department's social services inspectorate and published in 1987, a copy of which is available in the Library, gives guidance to local authorities on the provision of respite care.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to registration authorities regarding arrangements that may be made by private care and nursing homes for insurance cover for contents, liability, and loss of revenue.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. These are matters for the organisations concerned.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of the implications of the growth in private care homes for the type of resident now accommodated in local authority part III accommodation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is the Government's policy, set out in the White Paper "Caring for People", to encourage the contribution the independent sector can make in providing residential care for vulnerable people, in order to increase the choice for individuals and promote competition among providers. It is for individual local authorities in drawing up their community care plans to identify the range of services required to meet their population's community care needs, assemble information about current and prospective demand and supply of services in their locality, and secure a supply of appropriate services.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his current estimate of the capital investment needed by local authorities to bring the structural standards of local authority residential care homes up to the level required by his Department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local authorities to determine their capital needs for personal social services. The assessment of the need for structural work to be carried out in local authoritty residential care homes depends upon a number of factors, including the condition and suitability of the premises in the light of the standards they apply, as registration authorities, to independent homes, the extent to which they need to retain their own homes, and the availability of resources. Only local authorities themselves can carry out such an assessment.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to local authorities with regard to the criteria which may be applied to the size of private care homes when contracts for the provision for care are being placed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local social services authorities and health authorities, which are the

registration authorities for independent homes, to judge whether a home is of an acceptable size, in the light of such factors as the premises, staffing levels, the level of care required for residents and the quality of life offered.

Guidance has been issued to local authorities about the size of new local authority residential care homes. The code of practice for residential care, "Home Life," a copy of which is available in the Library, advises that the size of the building and the proposed number of residents should be considered in the context of the stated aims of the home. We would expect local authorities to have regard to this guidance when arranging contracts with private care homes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a local authority's statutory responsibilities for residents in local authority care home trusts differ in any way from their responsibilities for residents in local authority part III accommodation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide residential accommodation for persons who, by reason of age, infirmity or any other circumstances, are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them. This duty can be exercised by social services authorities either by providing the individual with accommodation in a local authority residential care home or by sponsoring them in an independent sector residential care home.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by his Department to develop alternatives to the institutional model of care for elderly or disabled people.

Mr. Dorrell: We are firmly committed to a policy of community care which enables elderly and disabled people, with appropriate support, to live in their own homes or in small homely settings in the community for as long as this is feasible and sensible.

The White Paper "Caring for People" made clear that health and local authorities are expected to work closely together in preparing community care plans that are compatible and comprehensive. Following the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Department issued guidance to assist authorities in this task and to develop good practice. We have continued to stress the key role of the voluntary sector in this process and the importance of ensuring that the wishes of the elderly or disabled person are taken carefully into account.

Social Service Placements

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of special agency placements by local authority social services departments for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about the number of such placements is not available centrally.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what feasibility studies his Department have undertaken into the comparative costs and benefits of differing forms of community care provision; and what were the results.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has undertaken a number of such studies in particular those carried out by the personal social services research unit at the University of Kent. They have shown that the costs and benefits of community care are dependent on a range of factors with a complex interrelationship. Copies of relevant studies will be placed in the Library.

Child Welfare

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any proposals to bring forward legislation on transferring responsibilities for child welfare within local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no such proposals.

Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any proposals to transfer the responsibility for the provision of personal social services from local authorities to district health authorities or national health service trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to do so.

Home Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities currently operate a 24-hour, seven days a week home care service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Special Agency Placements

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the financial implications for local authorities of the increased use of special agency placements by social services departments.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In deciding on appropriate finance for local authorities the Government take account of local authorities' assessments of the cost to social services departments of changes in policy, demand and demography.

North Devon Health Care Trust

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter, dated 4 December 1990, and that of his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Hooper, dated 14 January 1991, both addressed to the hon. Member for Devon, North, indicating the deferral of the application for establishing a North Devon health care trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[pursuant to the reply, 22 January 1991, c. 161]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has now decided to approve the application from Northern Devon Healthcare, formerly known as North Devon Healthcare, to be an NHS trust. The criteria adopted in considering trust applications were previously listed on 4 December 1989 at columns 77-82. They included:

> that the establishment of a trust will give clear benefits and improved quality of service to patients;

that management has the skills and capacity—including strong, effective leadership, sufficient financial and personnel management expertise and adequate information systems—to run the unit effectively;
that senior professional staff, especially consultants, are involved in the management of the unit.

In the case of the Northern Devon Healthcare Trust my right hon. Friend agreed, in response to a request from the sponsors, to defer the establishment of the trust at the time he made his decision to approve 56 NHS trusts.

My right hon. Friend has now decided, after careful thought and after having taken into account comments made during the consultation, to approve this application for trust status. The management team has now established itself and obtained the involvement of senior professional staff. The unit can now take advantage of NHS trust status.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computers (Security)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to ensure the security of *(a)* his Department's computers in-house and *(b)* lap-top personal computers when used by his civil servants outside his Department's offices.

Mr. Leigh: It is not Government policy to disclose details of the protective security measures for safeguarding computers used for official purposes. To do so would be of assistance to potential attackers and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the measures. These measures are kept under review.

The Gulf Crisis

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to enable British businesses directly affected by the economic impact of the Gulf crisis to weather the financial problems facing them at the present time.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* None. It is for businesses themselves, in consultation with their banks and financial advisers to consider what measures are appropriate to their specific circumstances. DTI regional offices are, however, giving priority to the needs of affected companies to help them find new markets. My Department is also taking appropriate action to assist British industry in playing a significant part in the reconstruction of Kuwait after its liberation.

Local Government

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a table of expenditure of his Department's programmes of grant aid and support to industry in 1989-90, broken down by programme and cross-tabulated by standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region, and including programmes of grant and other financial aid and also programmes of advice and training.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* A regional breakdown of expenditure on the Department of Trade and Industry's regional programmes and for other industrial support under the Industrial Development Act 1982, including the consultancy initiatives, is provided in the appendices to the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report for the year ended 31 March 1990. A regional breakdown of expenditure on other programmes is not available, nor is separate information available for Greater London, except at disproportionate cost, but the total level of expenditure on each of the Department's programmes is shown in the appropriation accounts for 1989-90.

Iraq (Loans)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the total number of Export Credits Guarantee Department loans outstanding to Iraq, and the cost, per year for 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 of facilities to promote British trade with Iraq.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 23 January 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 17 October 1990, *Official Report*, column *837*. There are currently 19 ECGD supported loans outstanding to Iraq.

The total cost by year of the various trade promotion facilities available for Iraq could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department's initiatives have focused on the prison estate. Energy efficiency has been promoted on the estate in the following ways:

the use of low-energy light units;
the use of high-frequency light units;
improved insulation of distribution pipework;
the installation of decentralised boiler systems using gas;
the use of automatic controls for lighting;
the introduction of building management systems;
water surveys;
energy surveys;
improved heat distribution;
building insulation;
the use of low-energy equipment;
the use of fuel additives;
waste-derived fuel trials;
zone control of heating;
the use of condensing boilers; and
the use of workshop heating controls.

Reductions in energy bills have resulted from tariff analysis, maximum demand analysis and power factor reduction.

Future measures will include the following:

the evaluation of combined heat and power systems and of waste gas fuel;
considering the use of contract energy management; staff training; and equipment evaluation and testing.

The energy bill for the prison estate was reduced from £19·43 million in 1988-89 to £19·2 million in 1989-90, a reduction of 1·2 per cent. despite an increase of 2·5 per cent. in the size of the estate.

We intend to introduce a programme of similar measures in non-prison estate buildings in 1991-92. It is not possible to provide the information requested on costs

in respect of those buildings, because the Department has been billed directly for its use of energy in them since April 1990.

Emergency Communications Network

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the report of Scicon Ltd's study of the emergency communications network; how much the study cost; what are the report's recommendations; and whether he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. John Patten: The study, which is expected to cost about £150,000, is not yet complete. A final report is due shortly. Because of the classified nature of some of the material, it is not proposed to place copies in the Library.

Cardphones (Prisons)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on allowing cardphones to be available at a prisoner's own expense for use in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will list the prisons where such a scheme now exists.

Mrs. Rumbold: We believe that the use of cardphones by prisoners is an important way of sustaining relationships with family and friends and relieving stress during the time in custody, and can help prisoners to prepare for release.

Cardphones are now available for the use of prisoners at all the establishments listed in the table. This includes all open establishments and almost all category C and equivalent female and young offender establishments; the installation of phones is in progress at the remainder. In addition a trial is under way at Winchester under which unconvicted prisoners have access to cardphones. The trial will shortly be extended to Manchester prison.

HM Prison Service establishments with cardphones for the use of prisoners

Acklington
Aldington
Ashwell
Askham Grange
Blantyre House
Camp Hill
Campsfield House
Channings Wood
Cookham Wood
Deerbolt
Dover
Drake Hall
East Sutton Park
Eastwood Park
Erlestoke
Everthorpe
Featherstone
Feltham
Ford
Glen Parva
Gloucester
Haslar
Hatfield
Haverigg
Highpoint
Hollesley Bay Colony
Huntercombe and Finnamore Wood Camp
Kirkham
Kirklevington
Lancaster
Leyhill
Littlehey
Lowdham Grange
Morton Hall
The Mount
Northallerton
Northeye
North Sea Camp
Norwich
Onley
Ranby
Risley
Rochester
Rudgate
Send
Shepton Mallet
Spring Hill
Stafford
Stoke Heath
Styal
Sudbury/Foston Hall
Thorn Cross
Thorp Arch
Usk
The Verne
Wayland
Wellingborough
Werrington
Wetherby
Whatton
Winchester
Wymott

Trevi Group

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the United Kingdom personnel in the Trevi group working on European policy; what are their terms of reference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I attend Trevi Ministers' meetings, and other meetings are attended by United Kingdom officials and police service representatives. Trevi exists to promote practical co-operation among European Community member states against terrorism, drug trafficking and other serious crime.

I attended a special meeting of Trevi Ministers on 22 January in Luxembourg, at which we discussed measures to counter the threat of terrorism associated with hostilities in the Gulf and reaffirmed our determination to co-operate fully to the end.

Police Posts

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra police posts were authorised throughout the United Kingdom *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend is responsible only for the police service in England and Wales. Between February 1974 and April 1979 the authorised establishment of the police service in England and Wales rose by 5,809. Since the Government took office in May 1979 the establishment of the police service has increased by 8,687 and my right hon. Friend has recently announced a further increase of 700 police posts to be implemented during 1991-92.

Immigration

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what active steps he has taken to resolve the case of Mr. A. A. (Reference A413117/2 (S)); why there have been delays in resolving this case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I explained to the hon. Member in my letter of 3 January further inquiries are necessary before we can reach a decision in this case. I shall write to the hon. Member when the inquiries are complete.

Young Offenders

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were sent to adult prisons whilst awaiting trial in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of them were involved in incidents where there were allegations of them being threatened or they came to physical harm.

Mrs. Rumbold: During 1989, the last year for which figures were available, 4,300 unsentenced young offenders were initially received in adult prisons. Information is available centrally on alleged assaults only where these gave rise to action by the police. In 1989, there were 13. Of these, 10 were carried out by other young offenders and three by adult males. There is no centrally available information on threats.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence his Department has obtained on the likelihood of young people awaiting trial to be sent to an adult prison if they live in a local authority which does not have its own secure centre as against those in an authority which does have such a centre.

Mr. John Patten: Local authority secure accommodation is a resource to which all local authorities in England and Wales have access. But the availability of secure accommodation locally and the local authority's willingness to use it for remanded juveniles may affect at present a court's decision whether it is necessary to remand a juvenile in Prison Department custody.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily cost of keeping a young person in *(a)* local authority secure accommodation and *(b)* an adult prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: The daily cost of keeping a young person in an adult prison during 1989-90 was £44.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that the disparity in types of local authority secure accommodation makes in impossible to provide a realistic representative figure for the cost of accommodating a young person in such accommodation.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to stop young people awaiting trial being sent to adult prisons.

Mr. John Patten: We intend to issue very soon a consultation paper setting out our detailed proposals for reforming the arrangements for the remand of alleged offenders under 17. This will include proposals affecting the use of Prison Department establishments for remanded juveniles.

Young Offenders

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unruly certificates were issued in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not recorded centrally. The only information available relates to juveniles initially received on remand into prison service establishments. These statistics are published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (table 2.7 of the volume for 1989, Cm. 1221), a copy of which is in the Library. An unruliness certificate is required for juveniles received as untried—1,387 in 1989—and for some of those received as convicted unsentenced—89 in 1989; it is not required for those committed in custody to the Crown court for sentence under section 37 of the Magistrates Courts Act.

Detention

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what statutory authority residents of Arabic or Palestinian origin are being arrested or detained, arising from the war in Iraq; what source of information led to arrest; whether these detainees have been questioned on these allegations; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on what basis residents of Arabic and Palestinian origin are being arrested or detained arising from the war in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what rights of representation have been accorded to persons detained without charge or trial in response to the war in the Gulf;

(2) what criteria applied to the recent arrest and detention of individuals currently resident in the United Kingdom without charge; and what is the authority under which they are held.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: By virtue of section 3(5)(b) of the Immigration Act 1971 orders of intention to deport have been served on a number of Iraqi and other nationals on my right hon. Friend's personal direction that their deportation would be conducive to the public good for reasons of national security. These decisions have been taken individually after careful consideration of information about the activities and associations of those concerned and in the light of the present threat of terrorist activities against the United Kingdom.

Under section 15(3) of the Act there is no statutory right of appeal against these decisions. Paragraph 157 of the statement of changes in the immigration rules, however, provides that those concerned may appear before a panel of independent advisers and make representations to them before the advisers tender their advice to my right hon. Friend. If it is decided to make a deportation order, they also have a right of appeal to the immigration appellate authorities against the destination specified. Under paragraph 2(2) of schedule 3 to the Act persons may be detained on my right hon. Friend's authority pending deportation.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of people detained under powers given to him under the Immigration Act 1971 who are holders of *(a)* Iraqi passports, *(b)*

Jordanian passports, *(c)* Israeli passports, *(d)* UN travel documents and *(e)* other passports since 1 January; how many are in (i) prisons and (ii) police stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by nationality, what are the numbers of persons arrested and detained without charge or trial in response to the war in the Gulf.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many non-Iraqi Arabic or Palestinian residents in Britain have been arrested or detained over the last two weeks; from what parts of the United Kingdom they have been taken; how long they have been held; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many residents of Iraqi origin have been arrested or detained in the last fortnight; from what areas of the United Kingdom they originated, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since August 1990, 160 Iraqi and 12 other nationals living in England, Scotland and Wales have been served with notice of intention to deport them from the United Kingdom on the grounds that their deportation would be conducive to the public good for reasons of national security. Fifteen Iraqis left for Jordan on 23 January and about half these individuals have now left the country before deportation orders were made. At 1030 hours on 23 January 47 Iraqis, four Lebanese, three Jordanians, one Yemeni and one naturalised United State's citizen were in detention in prisons, having been detained between 15 and 18 January; 31 Iraqis were detained in police cells having been detained on 22 January and 23 January. Additionally, two Iraqis detained had been identified as serving military personnel and transferred to military custody as prisoners of war.

Those detained have been advised of their right to make representations to the advisory panel and the majority have already done so. The decision to deport and to detain will be kept under review in the light of any representations which they may wish to make.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. Ali El Salem, of 69 Hamble road, Bedford, has been detained and considered for deportation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has decided that Mr. El Salem should be served with notice of intention to deport him from the United Kingdom on the grounds that his deportation would be conducive to the public good for reason of national security. He has been detained pending any representations which he may wish to make as to why he should not be deported. He may, if he wishes, appear before an independent advisory panel and make representations to it before it tenders its advice to my right hon. Friend. If it is decided to make a deportation order he will have a right of appeal against destination to the independent immigration authorities.

Mr. Mullins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list Iraqi nationals resident in Sunderland who have been detained within the last 10 days; and what decisions have been taken about their future in each case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Three Iraqi nationals resident in Sunderland have been detained in the past 10 days pending deportation on grounds of national security. I am not prepared to comment on individual cases.

SCOTLAND

AIDS

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been infected by the AIDS virus through the infusion of whole blood or platelets.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Up to 31 December 1990 the total number of reports in Scotland of people who have contracted AIDS as a result of their having received whole blood transfusions/platelets within the United Kingdom and abroad is five.

Farm Assurance Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has had any discussions concerning the Scottish farmers farm assurance scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is aware of this initiative by the National Farmers Union of Scotland.

Details of the scheme have still to be developed. In his view, however, the aims of this proposal, which are to secure consumer confidence in and demand for Scottish farm produce by developing and applying on a voluntary basis codes of best farming practice, are to be commended.

Salmon

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he has any plans to introduce further controls in respect of the salmon farming industry; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce a long-term strategy to control salmon farming.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government recognise the importance of the marine salmon farming industry in bringing economic and social benefits to communities in Scotland. Equally they acknowledge that the longer-term existence of the industry can be assured only if the natural resource base on which the industry is dependent can be used in a sustainable manner. In conjunction with the Crown Estate Commissioners the Government have therefore strengthened the procedures for open and independent consideration of the more contentious seabed lease applications for marine fish farming through the establishment of an advisory committee. The Scottish Office is currently engaged in drawing up revised guidelines covering the location and siting of marine fish farms and will consult widely before these guidelines are introduced.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet representatives of Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link to discuss salmon farming; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I met representatives of Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link for this purpose on

21 January. We welcome the involvement of voluntary conservation bodies in the debate on the future of the salmon farming industry and plan to consult Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link members as part of a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the establishment of revised guidelines covering the siting and location of marine fish farms.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the average time that patients wait for the results of cervical smear tests in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* each of the health board areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Figures are not available on a Great Britain basis. The average time taken to report results to patients across Scotland for the latest figures available (January to June 1990) was 30 days.

Information for each health board is as follows:

Health Board	*Average time in days*
Argyll and Clyde	31
Ayr and Arran	21
Borders	21
Dumfries and Galloway	3
Fife	33
Forth Valley	29
Grampian	77
Greater Glasgow	[1]4-7
	[2]28
Highland	32
Lanarkshire	35
Lothian	15
Orkney	[3]—
Shetland	48
Tayside	14
Western Isles	[4]—

[1]high risk
[2]low risk
[3]Tests processed by Grampian HB
Separate figures not readily available
[4]Tests processed by Highland HB
Separate figures not readily available

I regard those averages of more than 14 days as unacceptable and I instructed health boards on 13 December 1990 to achieve this average turnround time for all results by no later than 31 May 1991. Boards have already indicated that they are making progress towards this and the position will be monitored.

Missing People

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the Strathclyde police force area how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults are known to have gone missing for each of the last five years for which he has records; and how many were subsequently traced.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand from the chief constable of Strathclyde police that the available information is as follows:

Year	*Missing person reports received by the police*	*Persons traced (as at 31 December 1990)*
(a) Children (aged under 16)		
1986	5,582	5,582
1987	5,701	5,701
1988	4,733	4,732
1989	4,411	4,411
1990	4,604	4,592
(b) Adults (aged 16 or more)		
1986	3,139	3,135
1987	3,442	3,440
1988	3,767	3,762
1989	3,862	3,854
1990	3,559	3,525

Notes:

1. The information given relates to reports rather than individuals. Thus if the same person was reported missing on more than one occasion he will have been the subject of more than one report.
2. The information given does not include reports of persons missing from local authority residential establishments, prison establishments or the State Hospital, Carstairs.
3. Of the children untraced at 31 December 1990, two had been missing for more than 28 days.

Child Care Law

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to integrate the work of the Scottish Child Care Law Review Group with the work of law reform of the Adoption Law Review and the Scottish Law Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The report of the Scottish child care law review recognised the interaction between child care and adoption law. The observations made in that report about adoption have been conveyed to the interdepartmental group which is currently reviewing adoption law in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Law Commission subsequently published its discussion paper, "Parental responsibilities and Rights, Guardianship and the Administration of Children's Property". In considering the commission's final recommendations the Secretary of State will take into account the outcome of the two reviews.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to take forward the work of the Scottish Child Care Law Review Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: When the report of the Scottish child care law review was published on 19 October a wide range of organisations was invited to submit their comments on the recommendations by 14 December. A total of 79 responses have been received and are now being assessed. We shall carefully consider that assessment before deciding whether to accept the various recommendations and whether to promote legislation.

Recycling

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the plans announced on 9 November for a programme of investment in local authority recycling facilities will be implemented in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland capital expenditure allocations are not identified separately for local authorities' waste disposal and recycling activities. It is for local authorities to make my right hon. Friend aware of their intention to incur expenditure on recycling

facilities through their financial plans. Where authorities have identified such projects in their plans, priority has been given to these projects when consent allocations have been determined.

Conveyancing Research

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on conveyancing research by his Department.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am pleased to announce that a research report on factors influencing the market for conveyancing in Scotland has been published today. I have placed copies of the report, "The Market for Conveyancing in Scotland", in the Library. The research was carried out at Strathclyde university with Scottish Office funding.

The report concludes that there has been greater competition in conveyancing and house selling since 1985 when, with Government persuasion, the Law Society of Scotland introduced changes relating to advertising and fee quotations and abolished scale fees. The report also found that 40 per cent. of solicitors who responded were in favour of multi-disciplinary partnerships with non-lawyers. The statutory barriers to the formation of such partnerships were removed by the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990.

A second study which looks particularly at fees charged for conveyancing before and after the abolition of scale fees is in progress.

Haemophilia

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many haemophiliacs in Scotland who require Factor VIII injections are given the new highly purified material from Armour Pharmaceuticals; how many are given the older material from Bio Products; and if he will break down the figures for each health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* Five patients, four in the Lothian health board area and one in Greater Glasgow, are being treated with Factor VIII produced by the Armour Pharmaceutical Company. A further 245 are being treated with intermediate potency Factor VIII concentrate produced by the Scottish national blood transfusion service (SNBTS).

The prescribing of Factor VIII is a matter for clinical judgment, but there is no reason to consider that the current SNBTS product is less efficacious than commercial products for those patients for whom it is prescribed.

The SNBTS keeps all its products under review, developing them in line with technological and scientific advances. I have today given my approval to the SNBTS to enter into agreement with the French blood transfusion service at Lille to exchange technological knowledge. This agreement will enable the SNBTS to produce a higher potency Factor VIII which will be available for clinicians to prescribe to haemophiliacs in Scotland in the course of 1991.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Community Charge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing how many people in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland are in receipt of *(a)* full community charge benefit and *(b)* partial community charge benefit, also giving these figures as a percentage of the total number of poll tax payers; and if he will make a statement on his estimates of the number of people who are eligible but are not claiming community charge benefit for all poll tax payers and for all those aged under 25 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available estimates, based on benefit caseload processed by 31 August 1990, are as follows:

	Community Charge Benefit			*Percentage of community charge paying population*
	With Income Support (000)	*Without Income Support (000)*	*Total (000)*	*per cent.*
England	3,190	4,070	7,260	20
Wales	270	240	510	23
Scotland	480	470	950	25
Great Britain	3,950	4,780	8,730	21

These figures are likely to underestimate the current position, because some authorities still had a number of unprocessed claims at the time. Not all community charge payers are eligible for community charge benefit, and it is not possible to give estimates of the eligible population for community charge benefit until the appropriate survey data becomes available.

Note: Total does not equal sum of components because of rounding.

Source: Housing and Community Charge Benefit Management Information System August 1990 quarterly count of claims; and Family Expenditure Survey-based analyses.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were *(a)* the total numbers of recipients and *(b)* the total values of the payments made in (i) cash and (ii) constant terms under the exceptionally severe weather payments under the single payments regulations in each year from 1980 to 1988 and subsequently under the social fund exceptionally cold weather payments in each subsequent year, in Scotland.

Mr. Scott: Figures for Scotland are not available for 1980-81, and in 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84 no payments were made.

Figures for subsequent years are as follows:

	Awards	Expenditure (Cash terms) £	Expenditure (At 1990-91 prices)[1] £
1984-85	1	60	85
1985-86	84,235	1,927,991	2,591,741
1986-87	291,177	1,455,885	1,892,421
1987-88	84,631	426,583	525,846
1988-89	502	2,510	2,884
1989-90	43,782	403,157	435,410

[1] The Gross Domestic Product Deflator has been used to show expenditure at 1990-91 prices.

Note—Awards up to and including 1986-87 relate to the number of payments made, after then awards relate to the number of recipients during the year.

Dangerous Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines are issued to his Department's local offices regarding co-operation with other agencies in planning emergency liaison procedures in case of accident during the transportation of *(a)* radioactive waste, *(b)* nuclear warloads and *(c)* toxic waste.

Miss Widdecombe: Local offices have standing instructions on what to do in the event of local disasters. Action required includes liaison with local authorities and other appropriate agencies.

Household Incomes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how a household of *(a)* below-average income and *(b)* above-average income is calculated.

Mr. Jack: In the technical annex to the publication "Households below Average Income A Statistical Analysis 1981-87", published in July 1990, pages 75 to 78 are details of the definition of income, of how income is equivalised across households, and of the calculation of average income.

Each household's income is calculated as the total net income of all household members, either before or after housing costs. This amount is then divided by the equivalence value of the household concerned, using the DSS'sequivalence scales. This produces "equivalised household incomes", and takes account of the different income levels required by households of different compositions to achieve the same overall living standard.

The average equivalised household income is then calculated across the whole population. Thus this average is the sum of the equivalised household incomes of all people in the survey, divided by the total number of people. Each household's equivalised income is then either above or below this average.

Disability

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the purpose of the functional test of disability that claimants of the disability working allowance will be expected to undergo; and whether any duplication, in the evidence of disability required to be provided, will result from the new test.

Mr. Scott: In almost all first claims for disability working allowance (DWA) and about 60 per cent. of repeat claims the claimant's declaration that he has a disability which puts him at a disadvantage in getting a job will be accepted. The test of functional disability will be applied in other cases to provide evidence that the claimant still has a disability.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide details of the functional test of disability that claimants of the disability working allowance will be expected to undergo in order to ascertain whether they are at a disadvantage in getting a job on account of a physical or mental disability where their own declaration is not accepted as sufficient proof; in what percentage of cases his Department envisages the need for an additional test to provide proof of disadvantage; and what are his Department's estimates of the additional cost this test will entail.

Mr. Scott: In almost all first claims for disability working allowance (DWA) the claimant's own declaration will be accepted. In addition, we estimate that about 60 per cent. of second and subsequent claims will be by people whose declaration will generally be accepted without further confirmation; that is, those getting one of the higher rates of disability living allowance (the rates which are equivalent to the present attendance allowance and mobility allowance) or an analogous benefit or who were getting severe disablement allowance before claiming.

In other cases where the claimant is applying for a repeat award of disability working allowance, the claimant will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their functional disabilities. We estimate that the cost of administering the test for these claimants will be about £0·5 million per annum.

Social Fund

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to revise social fund loan arrangements in order to reduce the amount of staff time committed to calculating repayment schedules.

Mr. Scott: There are no plans to revise social fund loan arrangements at present. The microcomputer system was recently enhanced to provide more assistance to staff in the calculation of repayment terms.

Attendance Allowance

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases the six-month waiting period for attendance allowance has been waived since the relaxation of the rule for terminally ill people.

Mr. Scott: From 1 October to 31 December 1990 there were 14,200 awards of attendance allowance under the special rules for people with a terminal illness. This figure includes awards made on review.

Local Office, Glasgow

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what options are currently under consideration by his Department in relation to the site of the planned Glasgow, Pollok local office; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member on 20 December 1990 at column *318*.

Respite Care

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will consider expanding the categories of claimant service providers to whom payments of benefit may be made directly rather than to the user to include those respite care projects administered by the archdiocese of Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No. Individual cases are considered on their merits.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will consider directing offices to inform administrators of respite care projects of payments made to user claimants and carers in those cases where the authority of the recipient has been obtained; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: All personal information held in social security records is regarded as confidential and is not normally disclosed to third parties without the consent of the person concerned. Where the benefit recipient has given his consent, information on benefit payments can be given to the administrators of respite care projects. This is reflected in the procedural instructions issued to staff in DSS local offices.

Carers

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will consider undertaking a review of the presentation of explanatory information accompanying payments of benefit to carers; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Invalid care allowance is paid by order book. The information pages in the Department's order books are kept under review.

The Department is currently engaged in producing a new version of the invalid care allowance explanatory leaflet and claim form which we expect will be available from April. A new leaflet, containing general advice about benefits and services of interest to carers, is being developed at present and will be available in the summer.

Direct Payments

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will consider undertaking a review of the categories and criteria under which claimant service providers may receive payments of benefits direct; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so at present.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what ways the arrangements for the provision of income support for residents entering local authority trust care homes differ from the arrangements for a resident entering a private care home.

Miss Widdecombe: Eligibility for income support is defined by regulations. They provide that income support is available in respect of fees, up to certain limits, to residents of registered residential care homes and in certain other types of homes. Independent adjudication officers decide on benefit payable and are provided with guidance on the interpretation of the regulations by the chief adjudication officer in the published adjudication officer's guide, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to ensure that prior to the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act income support payments towards the cost of residential care are only made available to those individuals who actually require such care.

Miss Widdecombe: The level of income support payable depends on the type of care the residential care home is providing for the claimant. The adjudication officer must be satisfied that the home is recognised by the registration authority as able to provide a level of care and that the resident is receiving such care. We have no evidence to suggest that residents of registered care homes do not need to be there.

Care Allowance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he has issued regarding the payment of care allowance for those already entitled to the married woman's share of her husband's invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: Regulations govern both the award of invalid care allowance and invalidity benefit as well as the treatment of overlapping benefits. Decisions under those regulations are made by independent adjudication officers.

Guidance to adjudication officers is the responsibility of the chief adjudication officer and is published in the adjudication officers' guide.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Car Parking

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will arrange for a report on the feasibility of using the courtyard at the rear of the Norman Shaw North parliamentary building for parking by members and their staff.

Mr. MacGregor: The arrangements for car parking in the Norman Shaw car park were considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee in May 1988. However, I will arrange for the hon. Member's suggestion to be looked into.

Parliamentary Pension Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council what are the terms of his reference to the Top Salaries Review Body of hon. Members' and Exchequer contributions under the parliamentary pensions scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: Following discussions with the trustees of the parliamentary pension fund, and subject to the views of the House, I propose to write to the chairman of the Top Salaries Review Body as follows:

"At the conclusion of the debate on Parliamentary Pensions held on 17 January 1990 my predecessor said that he would examine what hon. Members had said with a view to framing a future reference to the TSRB on Parliamentary

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pensions. He subsequently held discussions with the Trustees of the Parliamentary Pension Scheme and others on both the current shape of the scheme and the implementation of the recommendations made in the review body's last report (the 26th). You will have seen that I introduced a Bill to enact those recommendations and other matters this session and the Second Reading took place on [ ]. Because of acute Parliamentary concern about the state of the Fund, we have taken the unusual step of making some changes to the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund (PCPF), particularly on widows' benefit, without consulting you. Nonetheless, a number of issues remain on which we would welcome your guidance.

As debates in the House have made clear, the principal issue on which we need your advice is the question of the so-called 'balance of contributions', that is the balance between the Exchequer and Member contributions.

The PCPF is a final salary scheme with the Member contribution determined on the basis necessary to fund benefits over the long term, leaving aside surpluses and deficits. Under section 3 of the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1987, the Government Actuary's Department (GAD), on the basis of the cost of known benefits, estimates the total contributions necessary to fund it in the long term (the total standard contribution). Since the Member contribution is fixed this yields the Exchequer contribution as a residual. Taking account of the performance of the Fund, the GAD then adjusts the Exchequer contribution to produce the rate actually paid. The effect is that the Exchequer funds deficits but, where there is a surplus, enjoys a contributions holiday. The financing system is in other words symmetrical.

The Trustees of the PCPF, amongst others, take the view that the character of the scheme in which the Exchequer makes contributions in this way—taking the benefit of surpluses and making good any deficits—should be changed. Their preference would be for a system which held a fixed relationship between the Exchequer and Member contribution—say in the ratio of 5:3 or 60:40. To match the current system, such a system would need to be symmetrical with regard to both surpluses and deficits, implying that the Member and Exchequer contributions would move up or down together according to the state of the Fund.

We would therefore welcome your views on the short and long term financing arrangements of the scheme and in particular what role the GAD should play. I intend that your report be debated and that the eventual government decisions on it should establish a definitive position on this issue for some considerable time to come.

On scheme benefits, as I have mentioned, we have decided to improve widows' and widowers' pensions from half rate to $\frac{3}{8}$rate in response to the Trustees' request for an increase to $\frac{1}{3}$, in the light of the debate in the House on 17 January 1990. In consultation with the Trustees the Government concluded that this was the appropriate response to Members' immediate concerns over the surplus in the Fund and the level of Exchequer contributions. I have made it clear that when there is no longer any surplus in the Fund Members' contributions will have to rise to meet the cost of this new level of benefit. This should not influence you in determining the Government's policy towards the financing of the Fund nor to what we consider the proper use of surpluses, generally. It was a specific action to meet a specific need.

During the 17 January 1990 debate, however, Members also raised the question of the accrual rate. You last looked at this in 1983 when you recommended an improvement in the accrual rate from $\frac{1}{60}$ to $\frac{1}{50}$. I would be grateful for your views on whether a further improvement is justified and if so on the implications for contributions.

I ought also to record some feeling among the Trustees and other Members that you should take account of experience in other Parliamentary schemes, both Commonwealth and European. Given the timescale, this might well need to be covered in a separate, subsequent Report.

I would like to consider and debate your report as soon as is practically possible so that any necessary changes can be implemented speedily. (As you will see, the Bill includes a power to make such changes by secondary legislation). So it would be of great assistance if you could report by this April.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Review Body for its last report under the chairmanship of Lord Plowden and thank you in advance for agreeing to examine these complex matters. The Trustees of the Parliamentary Pensions Scheme will join me, I am sure, when I say that we are fortunate to being able to call on the Review Body's objectivity in assisting our consideration of these difficult issues."

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Livestock Farmers

2. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assist small livestock farmers in the south-west who are in difficulties.

Mr. Gummer: All livestock farms, including those family farms, in the south-west to which my hon. Friend refers, benefit from a wide range of Government support measures which are forecast to cost some £815 million in 1990-91.

Set-aside Scheme

15. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the amount of money spent in 1990 on the set-aside scheme.

Mr. Curry: Payments under the set-aside scheme are made one year in arrears. In the 1990-91 financial year £17·5 million has been allocated to cover payments to farmers who joined the scheme in 1988 and 1989.

Oil Prices

16. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effects in the British farming industry of the rise in oil prices, since August 1990.

Mr. Gummer: Information on the cost of farm inputs, including fuel and oils, is published in table 6.1 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom: 1990", which is now available in the Vote Office.

Brogdale Horticultural Research Station

17. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about progress towards finalising the sale of the Brogdale horticultural research station and the future arrangement for the national fruit collections.

Mr. Curry: The Department is in negotiation on the terms of sale of the Brogdale site.

The Government will continue to fund the national fruit collection at Brogdale and it is intended that arrangements for its management will be secured by a contract between the Ministry, the Brogdale Horticultural Trust and Wye college.

Ramblers Association

18. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the Ramblers Association to discuss the future of access in the countryside: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My noble Friend the Minister of State met officials of the Ramblers Association on 3 May last year when a number of matters of mutual interest were discussed.

Common Agricultural Policy

19. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire).

Sheep Dip

20. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an estimate of the number of farmers using alternatives to organophosphorous sheep dips.

Mr. Maclean: One alternative to an organophosphorous sheep dip product is currently licensed under the Medicines Act. No estimate is available of how many farmers use it.

Food Safety

21. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the Consumers Association to discuss food safety.

Mr. Maclean: Representatives of the Consumers Association were present on 31 October 1990 at the third periodic meeting between my right hon. Friend and the office holders of consumer organisations.

The next meeting is planned for 20 February.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Food Advisory Committee last met to discuss food safety.

Mr. Maclean: At their meeting on 6 December 1990 the FAC continued its review of food labelling and considered also the safety of and need for two specific food additives.

Fishermen's Incomes

22. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to safeguard the future incomes of British fishermen.

Mr. Curry: At the Council of Fisheries Ministers in December we secured the best possible quota allowances for our fishermen for 1991 consistent with maintenance of the stocks. We are considering further technical measures to safeguard those stocks.

Fisheries Council

23. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest Fisheries Council.

Mr. Gummer: At the December Council of Fisheries Ministers, overall the United Kingdom secured a good package consistent with conservation of the stocks and which should benefit catchers, processors and consumers.

National Farmers Union

24. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss farming matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I frequently meet representatives of the farming unions to discuss matters of interest to the industry.

Fishing Industry

25. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to meet representatives of the fishing industry to discuss prospects for 1991.

Mr. Curry: I meet the industry frequently during the course of the year.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to increase the level of payments to farmers in the south downs under the environmentally sensitive area scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: ESA payments were reviewed last month and I concluded that they were still broadly at the right levels. Farmers will, however, benefit from a single annual payment rather than in two instalments. I will be reviewing the whole scheme this year on the basis of an evaluation of its environmental and economic impact and this will determine the way forward.

Animal Exports

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the export of farm animals on the hoof through the proposed Euro tunnel to mainland Europe.

Mr. Maclean: This Department remains ready to provide advice and to consider the practicability of detailed proposals to transport farm livestock through the tunnel. Were such traffic to be contemplated there would, of course, need to be stringent safeguards to protect the welfare of the animals in relation, for example, to ventilation and temperature.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on the farming industry which would result from a ban on live exports.

Mr. Maclean: There is no point in carrying out such an assessment, as a ban on the export of animals would contravene the treaty of Rome and would not therefore be proposed or permitted.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made towards his goal of retaining the minimum values order in respect of exports of horses and ponies.

Mr. Maclean: There have been no negotiations on the proposed Community regulation on the protection of animals during transport since February 1990. When negotiations resume we will continue to press for the retention of measures to prevent the export of horses and ponies for slaughter.

Meat Production

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentages of *(a)* cattle, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* pigs are (i) exported live for slaughter,

(ii) exported as carcases and (iii) consumed within the United Kingdom; and if he will give the most recent figures available for each category.

Mr. Curry: The information is in the table.

The following table gives information both in tonnage and percentage terms for the first three quarters of 1990 (latest available).

January to September 1990

	Beef and Veal		*Mutton and Lamb*		*Pork, Bacon and Ham*	
	Thousand tonnes (dressed carcase weight)	*Percentage of United Kingdom home-fed production*	*Thousand tonnes (dressed carcase weight)*	*Percentage of United Kingdom home-fed production*	*Thousand tonnes (dressed carcase weight)*	*Percentage of United Kingdom home-fed production*
1. Live exports[1]	10·8	1·5	15·3	5·5	6·0	0·9
2. Carcase exports	81·6	11·5	54·2	19·4	41·2	5·9
3. Remaining amounts available for consumption in the United Kingdom[2]	709·7	87·0	279·9	75·1	699·4	93·2

[1] Total live exports (other than pure-bred). A split is not available between animals exported for immediate slaughter and animals exported for further fattening.

[2] Home-fed production minus exports. Includes quantities sold into intervention.

DEFENCE

United States Special Forces

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the United Kingdom location of the United States armed forces special forces operational base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF Woodbridge.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement as to what role RAF Finningley will undertake if the Gulf dispute develops into armed conflict.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF Finningley's role as a flying training station is unaffected by current operations in the Gulf.

Mustard Gas

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been undertaken to assess the lethal potency of mustard gas used in hot dry climates compared with cooler wetter climates.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since the use of mustard gas in the first world war, many nations have conducted studies. Work was done in the second world war to assess the hazard presented by mustard in a variety of climatic conditions. The material has been continuously studied at the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down to ensure that the armed forces are provided with effective protective measures. The United Kingdom abandoned its chemical weapons capability in the late 1950s and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has made it clear that we would take the gravest view of any Iraqi attack using chemical weapons.

Army Exercises

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom has ever given permission for non-United Kingdom nationals to participate in Army exercises or operations in Northern Ireland since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All members of the regular Army, regardless of nationality, are liable to serve in Northern Ireland. Members of foreign armed forces serving in exchange posts do not serve in Northern Ireland, nor do foreign units take part in operations or training there.

Air Defence Radar

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the contract for the data processing network for air defence radar contains penalty clauses.

Mr. Alan Clark: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the contract for the integrated command and control system for the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment.

In line with normal Ministry of Defence practice, this contract does not include penalty clauses, which are not enforceable in English law.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has set targets for the reduction in consumption of energy, with a system of energy managers and wardens to help achieve these. In addition, investment has been made in "spend to save" measures, on items such as automatic lighting controls. In the future MOD will continue to set standards and to invest in energy-efficient measures such as combined heat and power (CHP) schemes. Although in the last financial year MOD continued to make savings in energy consumption, price alterations led to an increase in expenditure of £14·7 million or 8·3 per cent.

Gulf Forces

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contribution from each EEC country to the coalition forces in the Gulf to date *(a)* in manpower, *(b)* in aircraft, tanks and artillery and other equipment, *(c)* in financial support, *(d)* in spares and *(e)* others; and what steps are being taken to increase the Community countries' support in line with that of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At the outbreak of hostilities on 16 January, the United Kingdom had some 35,000 service personnel in the Gulf. Of the other EC member states, France has committed naval, land and air forces; Italy, naval and air forces; Belgium, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and Spain have sent naval vessels. In addition the United Kingdom has received assistance from a number of EC countries, including: NBC reconnaissance vehicles from Germany; ammunition from the Netherlands and Germany, and transport from Germany, Belgium, Spain and Portugal. Belgium and Denmark have also offered medical support. We will be discussing with our allies ways in which they might help meet any future needs.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is intended that all members of Her Majesty's armed forces based in the Gulf should have been inoculated against hepatitis A; and how many have been.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Personnel are given immunoglobin where it is judged necessary.

Public Relations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the terms of the contract for public relations given to Mr. Peter Gummer of Shandwick.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have passed this question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who will reply shortly.

HMS Ark Royal

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests have been made to him by the United States Government for the transfer of HMS Ark Royal from NATO exercises to an active role in the Gulf; and what was his response.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have regular discussions with our United States allies on our contribution to the coalition forces in the Gulf, but no decision has been taken to deploy a Royal Navy carrier group to the region.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the changes to be made in the Army's logistic support under "Options for Change."

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work is still continuing in a number of areas to determine the size and shape of the Army's logistic support under "Options for Change". However, as the first stage in this process, it has been decided to close the following establishments with effect from the dates shown in the table.

	Date
Moenchengladbach	
37 Rhine workshops	31 March 1992
Recklinghausen	
Forward vehicle depot	30 September 1991
Krefeld	
232 mobile civilian engineer group	30 September 1991
Viersen	
Ordnance services and associated supply depot	31 March 1992
Willich	
40 Army engineer support group	31 March 1992
64 (RCZ) workshop	31 March 1992
Antwerp	
Ordnance depot and other units at Antwerp station	31 March 1992

These plans take full account of the need to maintain effective support for our operations in the Gulf. Consultations on the closures have taken place with the appropriate German and Belgium authorities and NATO has been informed.

Royal Navy (Women)

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has plans to widen further the opportunities for the employment of women in the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We intend to widen the employment of women as aircrew to enable them to undertake aviation roles in the Royal Navy. Women will be employed initially as pilots, observers and aircrewmen in Sea King anti-submarine warfare and airborne early warning and Lynx anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare helicopters. Employment in the Sea Harriers and Commando helicopters will follow at a later stage. We intend to begin considering women for recruitment as aircrew immediately and also to seek volunteers from within the WRNS.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 25 January 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools, Cumbria

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much extra money would be available in the current year to each secondary school in Kendal, Sedbergh, Kirkby Stephen, Windermere, Milnthorpe, Kirkby Lonsdale, Cartmel and Coniston, in Cumbria, if the local education authority delegated 85 per cent. of its potential schools budget to the nine schools.

Mr. Fallon: As stated in my reply to my right hon. Friend on 20 December 1990 at col. *274*, Cumbria is delegating 82·53 per cent. of its potential schools budget in this financial year. If the LEA were to delegate more services to meet the proposed new requirement of 85 per cent., the actual distribution to schools of the additional resources would depend on which services were delegated and how the expenditure on each service was allocated between the primary and secondary sectors. If Cumbria were to allocate these resources pro rata to the existing budget distribution between primary and secondary schools, a secondary school would receive on average an extra £34,000.

Awards Regulations

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the reason for the length of the period of notice given to county councils in August 1990 in respect of changes to the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations; if he will make it his policy in future to give longer notice; what assessment he has made of the impact of these changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is my right hon. and learned Friend's policy to give as much notice as practicable to local education authorities of the content of the annual Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations for which he intends to seek Parliament's approval.

Local education authorities were informed of the main rates of student grant and the parental contribution scales proposed for academic year 1990-91 by an official circular letter in January 1990. Further letters and announcements between then and August notified them of the supplementary grant rates, revised arrangements for EC students and for the termly payment of tuition fees, and other mainly technical changes. The current regulations were made by SI 1990 No. 1628 on 7 August 1990 and came into force on 1 September 1990.

As usual, there had been extensive consultation with the local authority associations and others, from October 1989 onwards, about various planned changes. Most authorities should therefore have had early warning of these. The Department continues to keep awards arrangements under regular review, in consultation with the local authority associations and others.

Physical Education

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the sporting activities and aspects of physical education which will make up his Department's proposed flexible definition of physical education at key stage 4 in the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to publish his statutory proposals for physical education in the national curriculum later this year. Meanwhile he intends to offer guidance on the question raised by the hon. Member in his reply to the letter from the chairman of the national curriculum physical education working group. This correspondence will be published with the working group's interim report. I shall send the hon. Member a copy.

Nursery Classes

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he has given in relationship to primary schools who opt for grant-maintained status who then wish to establish a nursery class; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: If a primary school which had acquired grant-maintained status wanted subsequently to propose a significant change in its character by the establishment of a nursery class, the governing body would be required to publish proposals for that purpose under section 89 of the Education Reform Act 1988. The Department's circular No. 10/88 stated that the Secretary of State would not normally approve proposals for a change of character at a school within five years of its acquiring grant-maintained status.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether money allocated for a nursery class in a grant-maintained primary school will not be available for alternative use should the nursery class close.

Mr. Eggar: Funding is related to pupil numbers. If a nursery class were to close, and a result the school reduced its overall pupil numbers, its grant would fall.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what stage has been reached in the review of school premises regulations covering playing field provision at state schools; when this review will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: We are shortly to begin the public consultation stage of the review which is covering all aspects of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 including playing field provision. The results of the review are likely to be available towards the end of next year.

A-levels

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the number of students taking A-level examinations in *(a)* schools and *(b)* further education colleges in 1979-80, 1983-84 and the latest available figures.

Mr. Eggar: For the academic years in question and for 1988-89, the total numbers of school leavers and home full-time students in further education colleges taking A-level examinations were as follows:

Thousands

	1979-80	*1983-84*	*1988-89*[1]
School leavers	131·55	145·93	138·63
FE students	31·70	36·00	34·76
As percentage of the relevant population			
School leavers	17·3	18·7	19·1
FE students	4·2	4·6	4·8

[1] Including AS examinations paired to equate to an A-level.

School Premises

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *514*, by what date his Department intends to introduce amendments to section 42 of the Education Act 1986 to remove disincentives for third parties seeking to invest in dual-use projects.

Mr. Fallon: The amendment of section 42 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 is being considered for inclusion in the legislative programme at the earliest possible opportunity. In the meantime it remains our policy to encourage dual-use arrangements for the benefit of the whole community.

Pupil Assessment

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what local arrangements he envisages for administering the assessments of 14-year-olds.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Following advice from the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC), the Secretary of State for Wales and I have decided that, subject to the negotiation of appropriate contracts, the local oversight of consistent and rigorous assessment arrangements for pupils aged 14 across all schools under the national curriculum should rest with the examining bodies which certify assessments at age 16. Assigning responsibility for auditing quality to the examining bodies will help to ensure consistency of standards between the testing of 14-year-olds and the GCSE examination, and across LEA-maintained, grant-maintained and non-maintained schools alike.

In line with LEAs' duty under section 10 of the Education Reform Act to secure the implementation of the national curriculum in the schools they maintain, the Government will look to authorities to secure that their schools implement the assessment arrangements for 14-year-olds. The same duty will lie with the governors in grant-maintained schools. This will involve assuming responsibility for the professional development of the teachers making the assessments; supporting schools, where necessary, with help and guidance; and taking steps to put matters right in any schools where assessment standards slip.

The Secretary of State for Wales and I have asked SEAC to enter into discussions with the examining bodies, LEAs and representatives of other schools concerned to consider the practicalities of local assessment arrangements for 14-year-olds based on this division of responsibilities, and to let us have further advice in March.

We have also signalled to SEAC that, in the interests of rigorous and manageable assessment, the end of key stage tests which contribute to the overall assessments of 14-year-olds, pupils should take the form of written terminal examinations except where the nature of the subject matter can clearly be shown to justify some element of practical or project work.

I am placing copies of SEAC's advice and of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENERGY

Kuwaiti Oil Wells

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of Kuwait's oil production comes from wells that *(a)* lie within 50 miles of the coast, *(b)* lie within 20 miles of the coast, *(c)* lie within 10 miles of the coast and *(d)* are found offshore.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the 1990 International Petroleum Encyclopaedia.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what quantity of *(a)* low and *(b)* intermediate-level nuclear waste has been (i) transferred from and (ii) transferred to Sellafield from sites within the United Kingdom for each year since 1979; and if he will list, for *(a)* and *(b)* above, the sites concerned.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details of the quantities of radioactive waste at nuclear sites in the United Kingdom are contained in the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory published jointly by the Department of the Environment and United Kingdom Nirex Ltd., copies of which are in the Library of the House. Movements of waste between sites are management matters for the site operators, who must comply with the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action his Department is taking to encourage the use of refined refuse-derived fuel by the small-scale off-site user.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave him on 14 January at columns *447-48*, and to the answer that I gave him today in connection with current refuse-derived fuel research and development projects. My Department is considering all of the possible uses for refuse-derived fuels, outside the domestic sector.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *447-48*, what are his criteria for defining economically viable and environmentally acceptable.

Mr. Moynihan: Within my Department's renewables programme an economically viable technology is one where the rate of return offered to an investor is adequate to promote the investment, taking into account the particular circumstances of the market sector concerned.

The environmental acceptability of renewable energy resources is being considered within the research and

development programme undertaken by my Department. Renewable energy will be developed only if it can meet the various environmental standards appropriate for the activity concerned. Those technologies which can meet such standards are environmentally acceptable.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the 12 refuse-derived fuels research and development projects currently operating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The 12 current refuse-derived fuel research and development projects are as follows:

1. Refuse-derived fuel combustion trials.
2. Assessment of the suitability of a modified chain grate stoker shell boiler for the combustion of RDF pellets.
3. Fundamental studies into RDF combustion.
4. Development of the chain grate stoker shell boiler.
5. Development of existing systems for RDF combustion.
6. RDF combustion programme consultancy service.
7. Field trial on a boiler fitted with a gas scrubber.
8. Chain grate stoker and wet scrubber—monitoring.
9. Co-firing of RDF with coal in a large PF boiler.
10. RDF combustion—a technoeconomic feasibility study.
11. An assessment of RDF processing costs.
12. Storage and handling of RDF.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) of 19 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *162-63*, if he will make it his policy to introduce a separate category of bio-fuels, apart from the generic heading of waste incineration, to cover such items as refined refuse-derived fuels.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend will determine the technology bands to be included in the 1991 Renewables Order at a later stage, in the light of the statutory consultations.

Killingholme Power Station

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he intends to give planning permission to PowerGen and National Power to construct a lagoon to provide cooling water for the proposed combined cycle gas turbine developments at Killingholme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If either company wishes to construct such a lagoon they will need to apply for the Secretary of State's consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. When granting such a consent he may also give a direction that planning permission be deemed to be granted under section 90(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

No application for consent under section 36 to construct such a lagoon has been received.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Dr. Malde Mepa Moduadia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to reach a decision on whether he will take over the case of Dr. Malde Mepa Moduadia; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has a duty to represent the prosecution in the appeal of Dr. Malde Mepa Moduadia. Counsel has been instructed to represent the Director.

TRANSPORT

Inflammable Cargoes

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of road accidents in 1988, 1989 and 1990 involving vehicles carrying inflammable cargoes; and if he will list the number of fatalities and injuries as a result of these accidents.

Mr. Chope: The Department collects information only on road accidents involving personal injury. The standard report form, STATS19, completed by the police for these accidents does not include information on cargoes carried by the vehicles involved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for both of his local department offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow how many claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit were lodged during each of the past six years; how many had their claims accepted; and what has been the total amount paid out in such benefits.

Mr. Scott: Figures relating to the number of claims accepted and the amount paid in benefit are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, as could figures for the number of claims made at Greenock before April 1988. Such information as is available is in the table.

Claims received

April	*Greenock ILO*	*Port Glasgow ILO*
1990-91	[1]84	[1]94
1989-90	1,107	935
1988-89	130	86
1987-88	[2]—	268
1986-87	[2]—	509
1985-86	[2]—	190
1984-85	[2]—	159

[1] Figures available to December 1990 only.
[2] Not available.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the acquisition and ownership of consumer goods by pensioners in 1974, 1979 and 1990.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 11 December 1990, column 379]:* The following information was incorrect:

Percentage of pensioner households with goods

Goods	*1974*
Telephone	32·0

The correct information is as follows:

Percentage of pensioner households with goods

Goods	*1974*
Telephone	34·0

ENVIRONMENT

Barkley Thorpe

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received his Department's inspectors' report into the Barkley Thorpe site in Leicester.

Mr. Yeo: The inquiry has been arranged for 23 July and is expected to last for seven days. The inspector's report will be submitted as soon as possible after the inquiry has closed.

Urban Regeneration Grant

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of jobs created under the urban regeneration grant for each year since 1987;

(2) what was the amount of public money made available from his Department for each year since 1987, under the urban regeneration grant.

Mr. Portillo: The amounts of urban regeneration grant approved in each financial year from the introduction of urban regeneration grant in 1986 to its replacement by city grant in May 1988 were as shown in the table. These approvals in total, including projects not yet completed, are expected to provide 4,200 jobs in inner city areas.

Year	*£ million*
1987-88	12·163
1988-89	17·000
TOTAL	29·163

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of jobs created under the urban development grant, for each year since 1982;

(2) what was the amount of public money made available for the urban development grant for each year since 1982.

Mr. Portillo: The amounts of urban development grant approved in each financial year from the introduction of UDG in October 1982 to its replacement by city grant in May 1988 were as shown in the table. These approvals in total, including projects not yet completed, are expected to provide over 27,000 jobs in inner city areas.

Year	*£ million*
1982-83	0·686
1983-84	35·173
1984-85	22·565
1985-86	20·178
1986-87	32·977
1987-88	18·149
1988-89	12·835
Total	142·563

Council House Sales

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all councils' sales of council houses since 1981, in the order of the number of houses sold as a percentage of the opening stock in 1981.

Mr. Yeo: Twelve local authorities have so far transferred their entire housing stock to a housing association or private company: Chiltern, Sevenoaks, Newbury, Swale, Broadland, North Bedfordshire, Medina, Rochester upon Medway, South Wight, Mid Sussex, East Dorset, and Tonbridge and Malling. A number of other local authorities are in the process of similar transfers. The available information on sales, giving total sales for each local authority for each financial year since 1979-80 and percentages, is placed in the Library each quarter. The tables showing available information to June 1990 were placed in the Library on 29 November 1990. An updated version of the table giving available information to September 1990 will be placed in the Library shortly.

Planning Procedures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation making it a criminal offence to commence building without planning permission.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Greening Street Playing Field

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a request from the London residuary body to dispose of the Greening street SE2 playing field to the London borough of Greenwich; and when he expects to give his approval.

Mr. Key: Yes. Before the application can be considered further information is being sought from the London residuary body.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions he is considering for the use of schedule A category products in incineration.

Mr. Baldry: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the regulations that the Department is preparing to prescribe processes and substances for control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It is not intended in the regulations to restrict the substances for incineration. Any restriction on the way products are incinerated will be described in guidance which is still being drafted.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consider using European Community guidelines as a basis for a new categorisation of refuse-derived compost other than industrial waste;

(2) what steps his Department is taking to encourage the private sector and others to develop composting facilities for the processing of the vegetable content from the domestic wastes stream; and how such residues will be defined or classed;

(3) whether recycled products produced from a combination of separate primary products will have their

own primary status or be assigned the status of their main components for the purposes of statutory environmental controls.

Mr. Tony Baldry My Department is spending about £140,000 in this financial year on research into the composting of domestic waste and uses for the end product. Householders have been encouraged to start compost heaps in their gardens. Any classification of compost will depend on its content and proposed use.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider the classification of refined refuse-derived fuel with a view to removing it from a schedule A category base where levels of sulphur chloride and ash fall below emissions currently acceptable from fuels.

Mr. Baldry: The Department is considering the responses to the consultation on the draft regulations which prescribe processes and substances for control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The classification of the manufacture and burning of refuse-derived fuel is currently being reviewed.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what research has been conducted into links between refuse-derived fuel combustion and river pollution; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is taking to accommodate the development of markets for refuse-derived fuel.

Mr. Baldry: Development of markets for refuse-derived fuel is a matter for the manufacturers. No specific research has been conducted of the type described.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average length of time between the notice of decision to call in the planning application and the date of the commencement of the public inquiry in 19 cases of London call-ins since 1987 listed in his reply to the hon. Member for Twickenham on 22 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *37-38*.

Sir George Young: The time between call-in and inquiry in those cases varied between four and 39 weeks, the average being just under 25 weeks.

River Severn

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in the last year on problems of flooding and pollution along the River Severn.

Mr. Baldry: In the last year the Department received four representations, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food two representations, about the problems of pollution and flooding respectively, along the River Severn.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidelines to ensure that the true through-life costs of landfill sites are calculated when tenders for such sites are assessed by local authorities and others who have a duty of care under the Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Baldry: Yes. Under the Environmental Protection Act, local waste regulation authorities will be empowered to impose conditions in waste site licences governing the period after the deposit of waste has ceased. My Department will issue advice to authorities, which they will be statutorily obliged to heed, that they should set such conditions requiring the operator to exercise and pay for continuing pollution control until the authority certifies that the site is safe. It is for site operators to price their disposal services so as to recover the long term costs of such pollution control. This licensing system will apply equally to landfill sites whether operated by local authority companies or the private sector. It will be for waste disposal authorities letting contracts for the disposal of their waste to ensure that all tenders include the costs of compliance with licence conditions and other statutory responsibilities.

Marks and Spencer Store, Twickenham

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of the public inquiry due to commence on 5 February into the planning application for a Marks and Spencer foodstore at the River Thames embankment, Twickenham, if he will state on what date any informal or formal indication, whether by telephone, orally or in writing, was first provided by his Department to Marks and Spencer plc or Richmond-upon-Thames borough council as to the probable date of the inquiry; and on what dates a similar indication was first given to any known objector to the application.

Sir George Young: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for amending building regulations to take account of energy efficiency factors.

Mr. Yeo: The building regulations in England and Wales have contained specific requirements for the conservation of fuel and power since 1979. Revised requirements came into force on 1 April last year. These new provisions should achieve a saving of about 20 per cent. in energy requirements for space and water heating compared with buildings constructed to the former standards. The way in which the new requirements operate in practice will be monitored by the building research establishment as a basis for examining how the provisions might be further strengthened.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what quantity of *(a)* low and *(b)* intermediate-level nuclear waste is at Sellafield awaiting disposal or transfer to Scotland at present.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

Details of the quantities of radioactive waste at nuclear sites in the United Kingdom are contained in the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory published jointly by the Department of the Environment and UK Nirex Ltd. copies of which are in the Library of the House.

The only radioactive wastes stored at Sellafield (and Windscale Laboratories) which at present may be subject to transfer to Scotland are wastes which are the reponsibility of AEA Technology and which have arisen from work in support of AEA Technology's fast reactor programme. It is a management matter for AEA Technology to determine the appropriate storage and disposal arrangements for these wastes, with the approval of the regulatory authorities.

Wessex Water

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date Wessex Water will cease the dumping of sewage sludge into the Bristol channel; and what quantity was disposed of by this method in the latest two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The sea disposal of sewage sludge is to be terminated as soon as possible, and by 31 December 1998 at the latest. Wessex Water is preparing plans to cease sea disposal by the end of 1993. The amount of sewage sludge deposited by Wessex Water in the last two years for which figures are available is as follows:

Thousand tonnes (wet weight)	
1988	*1989*
218	236[1]

[1] Revised figure

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the reasons for the delay in the payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances; if he will arrange for early part-payments of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and when he expects to release the full value of hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Mr. Hanley: The Government are not yet in a position to announce the arrangements for payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances in 1991. This is because problems have arisen over the detailed implementation of a new EC ceiling on payments of 1·4 livestock units per hectare. Claim forms and explanatory leaflets will be issued to producers as quickly as possible once these problems have been resolved. It is not possible to be precise when payments will be made but the Government appreciates the importance of making HLCA payments in the early part of the year and every effort will be made to ensure that payments commence quickly.

Farming

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many dairy farms there are in Northern Ireland; and how many of these farms produce less than 200,000 litres of milk per year.

Mr. Hanley: In June 1989 there were 6,879 dairy farms in Northern Ireland; 4,984 produce less than 200,000 litres.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many farms produce cereals in Northern Ireland; and how many of these farms cultivate fewer than 75 acres of cereals.

Mr. Hanley: The June 1990 agriculture census indicates 5,698 farms in Northern Ireland where cereals were grown, of which 5,439 grew less than 30 hectares (74·1).

Fallen Animals

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the health and environmental implications of the decision by animal by-product plants not to accept diseased and fallen animals for disposal; and what measures he proposes to provide alternative means for disposal of such animals in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 December 1990]:* On 21 January I met the hon. Gentleman and a committee representative of the district councils in Northern Ireland to discuss the disposal of fallen animals. The meeting was constructive and encouraging with a full and frank exchange of views.

I will be continuing discussions with one of the plants involved in rendering animal by-products on proposals that they have put forward for a long-term solution to the problem.

I will continue to seek a short-term solution, but until rendering recommences in the interests of all in Northern Ireland, I hope and expect farmers to dispose of their fallen stock appropriately as is their responsibility.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Leigh: In its contracts with business the Department includes energy efficiency as one of the subjects that it encourages firms to address in developing a comprehensive approach to environmental management.

On energy usage directly under the Department's control, the Department has appointed energy managers in all its main establishments. They are undertaking energy audits and preparing action plans in pursuit of the target to reduce energy usage by 15 per cent. in the next five years. The Department has identified areas where draught proofing and insulation could reduce heat loss and has implemented a considerable amount of remedial action. Conventional lighting has been replaced by energy conservation fittings. The efficiency and the time of operation of heating and air conditioning plant have been reviewed with a view to reducing energy usage and operating times while maintaining an acceptable environment. These programmes will continue in the future. In addition, some inefficient boilers are being replaced and building energy management systems are being updated in main buildings.

On savings achieved, responsibility for energy efficiency has until recently been shared between Department of Environment Property Holdings and the Department of Trade and Industry and the information has not been collected in the form requested. It will be available in future years.

Levitt Group

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date he became aware of problems in the Levitt group.

Mr. Redwood: It is not the Department's practice to give details of individual companies.

Liquidations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the number of glazing companies that have gone into liquidation in each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not available.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what restrictions exist on directors of recently liquidated companies setting up business and trading while previous company debts remain unpaid.

Mr. Redwood: There are provisions under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 (CDDA 1986) which enable the Secretary of State to make applications in the civil courts as regards directors whose conduct in liquidations has been reported upon.

There are also provisions under section 216 of the Insolvency Act 1986 whereby, with some exceptions, a director of a company which has gone into insolvent liquidation may not be involved with another with the same or a similar name within five years of the failure of the first company.

Biotechnology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 20 December 1990, on the progress of the EC discussions on the generally accepted biological meaning of the expression "variety" in relation to the EC proposal in relation to biotechnological inventions.

Mr. Leigh: The draft EC directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions excludes both plant and animal varieties from patentability. For plants, this exclusion will probably be interpreted in accordance with a definition expected to be introduced into the international convention for the protection of new varieties of plants (UPOV convention) when it is revised at a diplomatic conference to be held in March. For animals, there is no generally accepted biological meaning of the expression "variety" and progress in determining the scope of the exclusion is slow. The next meeting to discuss the draft directive will probably be in April; however, it may be that the exclusion of animal varieties will not be comprehensively discussed until a final decision has been reached by the European patent office on an application which is presently before it for a method of producing transgenic animals.

British Technology Group

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the fee agreed with Price Waterhouse for advising on the sale of British Technology Group.

Mr. Lilley: The total costs of the proposed privatisation of the British technology group including the fees payable to Price Waterhouse, will be made available to Parliament after the privatisation.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library the corporate plan for British Technology Group.

Mr. Lilley: The corporate plan is a confidential management document containing commercially sensitive information. However, copies of the annual reports and accounts of the National Enterprise Board and the National Research Development Corporation are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the budget for publishing or advertising of the British Technology Group sale.

Mr. Lilley: The costs for publicity or advertising of the proposed British Technology Group sale will arise in the 1991-92 financial year, estimates for which will shortly be presented to Parliament.

It is proposed that the Department's costs will be met from within the Department's vote.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost of the Coopers and Lybrand report on British Technology Group.

Mr. Lilley: It is not the normal practice of my Department to disclose the costs of individual consultancies.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library the Coopers and Lybrand report on British Technology Group.

Mr. Lilley: This report was prepared in 1988 to advise my Department on the feasibility and mechanics of privatising the British Technology Group. It contains information which is confidential and commercially sensitive and it is therefore not for wider circulation.

Advisers' Fees

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost of advisers' fees in *(a)* the sale of Rover, *(b)* the sale of Girobank and *(c)* the sale of British Telecom.

Mr. Lilley: The fees paid to Government advisers for the sale of Rover Group were £270,229; and for British Telecommunications the figure was £12 million. The fees paid for advice to Government on the sale of Girobank are subject to commercial confidentiality.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for each year since 1979 the number of bankruptcies of private care homes.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* This information is not available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for each year since 1979 the number of bankruptcies of private nursing homes.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* This information is not available.

Aerogrammes

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements are being made to ensure the availability of aerogrammes at post offices for the use of families of service men abroad.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* This is a joint operational matter for the Post Office and for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. However, following the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) in the House on Wednesday 23 January at column 312, my Department has been in touch with both the Post Office and the Ministry of Defence. I understand that because of a sudden upsurge in demand for them, stocks of free forces aerogrammes have been exhausted in some isolated areas. However, the Ministry of Defence has now arranged for substantial further supplies to be made available to the Post Office, which is distributing them to areas of shortage as a matter of urgency.

WALES

Community Charge

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list all the communities in Wales which will benefit from the new community charge reduction scheme which he is introducing in 1991-92; and if he will indicate those communities which did not previously qualify for transitional relief;

(2) if he will estimate the amount of community charge reduction in 1991-92 for each of the local councils in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the communities benefiting from the reduced community charges under the transitional relief scheme and/or the community charge reduction scheme are given in the following table. Compared with 1990-91 the amount made available by the Government for reductions in community charges in Wales has been increased by £42 million to £62 million; the number of qualifying communities has increased from 323 to 612 and the number of chargepayers who are expected to benefit has increased from around 750,000 to around 1·4 million out of a total of 2·1 million.

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under	
	Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	*Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £*
Alyn and Deeside		
Buckley	0	14
Connah's Quay	0	11
Hope	0	37
Llanfynydd	0	40
Queensferry	0	49
Saltney	0	32
Sealand	0	41
Shotton	0	33
Treuddyn	0	49

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under	
	Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	*Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £*
Colwyn		
Betws yn Rhos	0	45
Cerrigydrudion	19	75
Colwyn Bay	0	3
Llanfair Talhaiarn	1	57
Llanihangel Glyn Myfyr	22	78
Llangernyw	9	65
Llangwm	1	57
Llannefydd	5	61
Llansannan	5	61
Llysfaen	0	22
Mochdre	0	13
Pentrefoelas	31	87
Trefnant	0	19

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under	
	Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	*Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £*
Delyn		
Bagillt	0	42
Bynford	6	54
Caerwys	0	26
Cilcain	0	14
Flint	0	27
Halkyn	0	45
Holywell	0	23
Leeswood	2	51
Llanasa	0	11
Mostyn	0	37
Nannerch	0	19
Nercwys	12	60
Northop	0	7
Northop Hall	0	9
Trelawnyd and Gwaenysgor	0	36
Whitford	0	5
Ysceifiog	0	33

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under	
	Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	*Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £*
Glyndwr		
Aberwheeler	17	98
Betws Gwerful Goch	41	122
Bryneglwys	21	102
Ceiriog Ucha	0	78
Chirk	0	45
Clocaenog	26	107
Corwen	7	88
Cyffylliog	10	91
Cynwyd	20	101
Denbigh	0	45
Derwen	0	81
Efenechtyd	0	38
Glyntraian	0	69
Gwyddelwern	29	110
Henllan	0	59
Llanarmon-yn-Ial	0	63
Llandegla	0	75
Llandrillo	0	74
Llandyrnog	0	69

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Llanelidan	1	82
Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd	0	63
Llanferres	0	68
Llangedwyn	26	107
Llangollen	0	56
Llangollen Rural	0	71
Llangynhafel	0	46
Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant	26	107
Llanrhaeadr-yng-Nghinmeirch	0	66
Lansantffraid Glyn Ceiriog	0	79
Llansilin	4	86
Llantysilio	0	66
Llanynys	0	59
Nantyglyn	13	94
Ruthin	0	21

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Rhuddlan		
Bodelwyddan	2	63
Bodfari	0	58
Cwm/Tremeirchion/Waen	4	66
Dyserth	0	15
Prestatyn	0	1
Rhyl	0	48
St. Asaph	0	29

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Wrexham Maelor		
Abenbury	0	19
Bronington	0	55
Broughton	9	77
Brymbo	8	75
Caia Park	0	68
Cefn	8	75
Coedpoeth	0	64
Erbistock	0	13
Esclusham	0	55
Gwersyllt	0	62
Hanmer	0	44
Holt	0	22
Iscoed	1	69
Llay	0	60
Maelor South	3	70
Marchwiel	0	16
Minera	0	37
Offa	0	29
Overton	0	42
Penycae	10	77
Rhosddu	0	15
Rhosllanerchrugog	0	67
Rossett	0	6
Ruabon	0	54
Willington Worthenbury	0	57

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1991-92) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1990-91) £
Carmarthen		
Abergwili	0	19
Abernant	52	77
Bronwydd	0	8
Cenarth	28	53
Cilymaenllwyd	47	72
Clynderwen	16	41
Cynwl Elfed	31	56
Eglwyscummin	19	44
Gorslas	5	30
Henllanfallteg	33	58
Laugharne Township	3	28
Llanarthney	13	38
Llanboidy	48	73
Llandarrog	6	31
Llanddowror	27	52
Llandyfaelog	0	17
Llanfihangel-ar-Arth	15	40
Llanfihangel Rhos-y-Corn	42	67
Llangain	13	38
Llangeler	21	46
Llangyndeyrn	19	44
Llangynin	26	51
Llangynog	34	59
Llanllawddog	16	41
Llanllwni	22	47
Llanpumsaint	34	59
Llansteffan	1	26
Llanwinio	47	72
Llanybydder	13	38
Llanycrwys	54	79
Meidrim	30	55
Newcastle Emlyn	0	13
Newchurch and Merthyr	14	39
Pencarreg	23	48
St. Clears	0	15
St. Ishmael	0	10
Trelech	46	71
Whitland	2	27

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1991-92) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1990-91) £
Ceredigion		
Aberporth	0	3
Beulah	28	42
Blaenrheidol	0	13
Ceulanamaesmawr	0	5
Ciliau Aeron	43	57
Dyffryn Arth	30	44
Henfynyw	15	29
Llanarth	22	36
Llandewi Brefi	10	24
Llandyfriog	31	45
Llandsiliogogo	44	58
Llandysul	28	42
Llanfair Clydogau	44	58
Llanfihangel Ystrad	33	47
Llangeitho	26	40
Llangoedmor	3	17
Llangrannog	0	14
Llangwyryfon	31	45
Llangybi	42	56
Llansantffraid	0	13
Llanwenog	44	58
Llanwnnen	38	52

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1991-92) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1990-91) £
Lledrod	23	38
Nantcwnlle	38	52
Penbryn	16	31
Pontarfynach	23	37
Trawsgoed	7	21
Tregaron	0	1
Troedyraur	41	55
Ysbyty Ystwyth	10	24
Ystrad Fflur	7	21
Ystrad Meurig	10	24

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Dinefwr		
Ammanford	0	8
Betws	3	29
Cilycwm	38	64
Cwmamman	20	46
Dyffryn Cennen	18	45
Cynwyl Gaeo	50	77
Llanddeusant	56	83
Llandeilo	0	13
Llandovery	0	25
Llandybie	1	27
Llandgwad	0	26
Llanfair-ar-y-bryn	47	74
Llanfihangel Aberbythych	17	44
Llanfynydd	49	76
Llangadog	30	57
Llangathen	15	42
Llansadwrn	49	76
Llansawel	44	71
Llanwrda	15	42
Manordeilo and Salem	11	38
Myddfai	44	71
Quarter Bach	20	47
Talley	46	73

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Llanelli		
Cefn Sidan	10	30
Kidwelly	38	57
Llanedi	16	36
Llanelli	2	22
Llanelli Rural	3	23
Llangennech	12	32
Llannon	32	52
Pontyberem	37	56
Trimsaran	43	63

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1991-92) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1990-91) £
Preseli Pembrokeshire		
Ambleston	32	54
Boncath	20	42
Brawdy	59	81
Burton	0	11
Camrose	0	18
Cilgerran	16	38
Clydey	49	71
Crymych	32	54
Cwm Gwaun	48	70
Dale	0	3
Dinas Cross	0	5
Eglwyswrw	31	54
Fishguard and Goodwick	0	19
Freystrop	0	19
Hayscastle	10	32
Johnston	0	15
Letterston	1	23
Llandissilio West	15	37
Llangwm and Hook	0	16
Llanrhian	10	32
Llanstadwell	14	36
Maenclochog	31	53
Manordeifi	28	50
Marloes and St. Brides	14	36
Mathry	30	52
Mynachlog-Ddu	56	78
Nevern	21	43
New moat	41	63
Newport	0	3
Neyland	10	32
Pencaer	24	46
Puncheston	48	70
Rosemarket	11	33
Scleddau	22	44
Solva	0	8
Spittal	5	27
St. Davids and the Cathedral Close	0	12
St. Dogmaels	16	38
St. Ishmaels	2	24
Tiers Cross	4	26
Trecwn	19	41
Walwyn's Castle	13	35
Wiston	17	39
Wolfcastle	20	42

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
South Pembrokeshire		
Angle	2	19
Caldey Island	—	46
Carew	7	23
Castlemartin	16	32
Hundleton	9	25
Jeffreyston	34	50
Kilgetty-Begelly	0	2
Lampeter Velfrey	7	24
Llandewi Velfrey	28	44
Llawhaden	22	38
Martletwy	9	25
Pembroke Dock	10	26
Slebach	20	37
Stackpole	7	23
Templeton	0	4

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Blaenau Gwent		
Abertillery and Llanhilleth	49	80
Beaufort	10	42
Brynmawr	24	56
Cwm	56	88
Ebbw Vale	34	65
Nantyglo and Blaina	28	59
Tredegar	31	62

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Islwyn		
Abercarn	31	60
Argoed	30	59
Blackwood	0	28
Cefn Forest	26	55
Crosskeys	23	52
Crumlin	16	45
Newbridge	24	53
Pengam	18	47
Penmaen	5	34
Pontllanfraith	0	21
Risca	0	28
Ynysddu	38	67

Comparison of transitional relief and community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Monmouth		
Caerwent	0	6
Llantilio Crossenny	0	4
Rogiet	0	19
Tintern	0	10

Comparison of transitional relief and community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Newport		
Bettws	0	7
Bishton	0	27
Coedkernew	0	15
Goldcliffe	0	28
Liswerry	0	27
Malpas	0	15
Nash	4	49
Pillgwenlly	0	34
Redwick	0	38
Ringland	0	3
St. Julians	0	15
Stowe Hill	0	35
Victoria	9	53
Wentlooge	1	46

Comparison of transitional relief and community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Torfaen		
Abersychan	2	41
Blaenavon	14	53
Cwmbran Central	0	5
Henllys	17	56
Panteg	0	20
Pen Tranch	22	62
Pontnewydd	0	4
Pontymoile	0	33
Trevethin	1	40

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Aberconwy		
Bro Garmon	8	42
Bro Machno	29	62
Caerhun	0	8
Capel Curig	2	36
Dolgarrog	12	46
Dolwyddelan	0	28
Eglwysbach	0	10
Llanddoged and Maenan	0	16
Llanfairfechan	0	22
Llanrwst	0	13
Trefriw	0	9
Ysbyty Ifan	32	66

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Arfon		
Aber	0	2
Bangor	0	10
Bethesda	10	53
Betws Garmon	9	52
Bontnewydd	0	20
Caernarfon	0	2
Llanberis	22	65
Llanddeiniolen	9	53
Llandygai	0	32
Llandwrog	2	45
Llanllechid	0	17
Llanllyfni	15	59
Llanrug	0	19
Llanwnda	0	32
Pentir	0	8
Waunfawr	0	25
Y Felinheli	0	1

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Merthyr Tydfil		
Bedlinog	41	63
Dowlais	35	58
Merthyr Vale	46	69
Pant	9	32
Park	0	21
Pennydarren	18	41
Town	22	45
Treharris	25	48
Troed-y-rhiw	47	70
Vaynor	0	6

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Ogwr		
Bridgend	0	26
Cefn Cribwr	54	81
Coychurch Higher	59	86
Cynffig	44	71
Garw Valley	93	120
Laleston	0	22
Llangynwyd Lower	54	81
Llangynwyd Middle	49	76
Maesteg	62	89
Newcastle Higher	0	17
Ogmore Valley	75	102
Pencoed	0	22
St. Bride's Minor	66	93
Ynysawdre	60	87

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Rhondda		
Cwm Clydach	41	81
Cymmer	41	81
Ferndale	41	81
Llwynypia	41	81
Maerdy	41	81
Pentre	41	81
Pen-y-graig	41	81
Porth	41	81
Tonypandy	41	81
Trealaw	41	81
Trehafod	41	81
Treherbert	41	81
Treorchy	41	81
Tylorstown	41	81
Ynyshir	41	81
Ystrad	41	81

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Rhymney Valley		
Aber Valley	39	66
Bargoed	37	65
Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen	0	9
Darran Valley	60	87
Gelligaer	12	39
Llanbradach	13	40
Maesycwmmer	0	12
Nelson	10	37
New Tredegar	78	105
Rhymney	32	59

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Taff-Ely		
Gilfach Goch	21	65
Llanharan	0	22
Llanharry	0	35
Pontypridd	0	34
Tonyrefail	5	49

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (191-92) £
Brecknock		
Builth	0	9
Cray	0	36
Duhonw	0	3
Erwood	0	27
Felin-fach	0	24
Glyn Tarell	0	7
Honddu Isaf	9	14
Llanafanfawr	0	37
Llanfrynach	0	7
Llangamarch	0	36
Llanwrthwl	0	24
Llanwrtyd Wells	0	17
Llywel	0	37
Maescar	0	25
Merthyr Cynog	12	50
Talybont-on-Usk	0	1
Tawe-Uchaf	10	48
Trallong	0	32
Treflys	0	29
Yscir	0	4
Ystradfellte	0	21
Ystradgynlais	4	42

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Montgomeryshire		
Aberhafesp	0	10
Banwy	0	19
Bausley with Criggion	0	3
Berriew	0	10
Bettws	0	8
Cadfarch	0	1
Caersws	0	4
Carno	0	9
Castle Caereinion	0	13
Churchstoke	0	20
Dwyriw	4	36
Forden	0	5
Glantwymyn	0	19
Kerry	0	10
Llanbrynmair	0	26
Llandinam	0	20
Llandyssil	0	24
Llanerfyl	0	18
Llanfair Caereinion	0	9
Llanfechan	0	19
Llanfihangel	9	41
Llanfyllin	0	15
Llangurig	0	27
Llangyniew	0	15
Llangynog	0	21
Llanidloes Without	0	20
Llanraeadr-ym-Mochnant	0	18
Llansantffraid	0	4
Llanwddyn	0	23
Manafon	0	12
Meifod	0	14
Mochdre	0	4
Pen-y-Bont-Fawr	0	11
Trefeglwys	0	20
Tregynon	0	5

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Radnorshire		
Abbey Cwmhir	6	34
Beguildy	0	11
Disserth and Trecoed	0	6
Gladestry	0	26
Glasbury	0	4
Glascwm	0	11
Llanbadarn Fynydd	5	33
Llanbister	5	32
Llanddewi Ystradenny	0	21
Llanelwedd	0	18
Llanfihangel Rhydithon	0	13
Llangunllo	0	23
Nantmel	0	11
Old Radnor	0	23
Painscastle	0	7
Penybont	0	18
St. Harmon	0	21
Whitton	0	16

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Cardiff		
Adamsdown	9	86
Butetown	0	5
Caerau	0	25
Canton	0	35
Cathays	5	83
Ely	0	23
Fairwater	0	15
Gabalfa	0	45
Grangetown	0	56
Llandaff North	0	27
Llanrumney	0	23
Plasnewydd	0	56
Riverside	0	50
Rumney	0	18
Splott	0	70
Tongwynlais	0	40
Trowbridge	0	33

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charg reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Vale of Glamorgan		
Llantwit Major	0	11
St. Athan	0	24
St. Donats	14	59

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Port Talbot		
Aberavon	38	60
Baglan	0	3
Bryn	42	64
Cwmavon	7	29
Glyncorrwg	73	95
Margam	0	18
Port Talbot	23	45
Sandfields East	2	24
Sandfields West	28	50
Tai Bach	26	48

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Lliw Valley		
Cilybebyll	10	32
Clydach	21	42
Cwmllynfell	54	76
Gorseinon	20	42
Gowerton	4	26
Grovesend	36	58
Gwaun-cae-Gurwen	52	74
Llwchwr	6	28
Mawr	54	76

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Penllergaer	0	15
Pontardawe	32	54
Pontardulais	19	41
Ystalyfera	56	78

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Neath		
Blaengwrach	53	72
Briton Ferry	32	50
Clyne	52	71
Coedffranc	11	30
Crynant	30	48
Dyffryn Clydach	8	27
Glynneath	48	67
Neath	16	35
Onllwyn	77	96
Pelenna	50	69
Resolven	66	85
Seven Sisters	72	91
Tonna	13	32

Comparison of transitional relief and Community charge reduction schemes
Communities benefiting

	Amount payable under Transitional relief scheme (1990-91) £	Community charge reduction scheme (1991-92) £
Swansea		
Birchgrove	0	28
Bonymaen	11	42
Castle	10	42
Cockett	0	19
Cwmbwrla	35	66
Landore	67	98
Llanrhidian Higher	8	39
Llanrhidian Lower	0	26
Llansamlet	0	31
Morriston	0	27
St. Thomas	52	83
Townhill	9	40

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. David Hunt: My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) published a strategic plan for the encouragement of energy efficiency in May 1989. Copies were placed in the Library of the House. Since then the Energy Efficiency Office in the Welsh Office has carried out a vigorous programme of visiting to industrial and commercial organisations and organised 40 seminars to promote tried and tested methods of efficiently reducing energy use.

Following the publications of the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", these efforts are being intensified in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom and will be overseen by a ministerial committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is a member of the committee.

Figures for the Welsh Office's own energy expenditure in 1989-90 and 1990-91 are not available on a directly comparable basis because of the transfer of responsibility for bill paying from Property Services Agency to Welsh Office with effect from 1 April 1990.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce a similar programme to the energy efficiency demonstration programme scheduled to begin in England in April.

Mr. David Hunt: There are no plans to earmark the substantial resources available for local authority renovation in 1991-92 for this specific purpose. Local authorities in Wales have already made very considerable progress in improving the energy efficiency of their stock and it will be for them to decide what priority to accord further energy efficiency measures.

Farmers (Oil Prices)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effects in the farming industry in Wales of the rise in oil prices since August 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The specific effects of oil price changes since August on farm incomes cannot be separately calculated for Wales. However, changes in oil prices and other energy based inputs are automatically taken into account in the assessment of farming incomes which in turn provide the background for decisions on livestock support.

NATIONAL FINANCE

National Insurance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of changing the national insurance threshold into a tax allowance in 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The estimated full year cost of abolishing the charge on the first £52 per week of earnings for those employees earning above the lower earnings limit would be about £1·1 billion for 1991-92.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what specific measures Her Majesty's Treasury has taken to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill Her Majesty's Treasury's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: On the measures taken and to be taken to promote energy efficiency within Her Majesty's Treasury, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 28 June 1990 at column *291*. As to

associated financial savings, for financial year 1990-91 it is estimated that the department will reduce its total energy bill by approximately £5,000 or 2 per cent. of its 1989-90 spend.

Income Tax

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the Inland Revenue's review of the tax problems experienced by temporary office staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Although I have not asked the Inland Revenue to review the taxation of temporary office staff, the Department is considering whether improvements may be possible to alleviate problems in the operation of PAYE which can be experienced by agency workers, agencies and the Inland Revenue. These problems stem from the difficulty of maintaining cumulation for employees who undertake a number of short-term engagements in quick succession. There are no easy solutions but the Revenue will be taking a number of steps to try to improve matters. These will include publicity emphasising the need for timely provision of national insurance numbers; and seeking better liaison between tax offices and agencies.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Treasury income during the 1991-92 financial year resulting from the introduction of an alternative minimum tax of 20 per cent. of the gross incomes of individuals whose incomes exceed £40,000 a year and whose tax liability would otherwise be less than that amount.

Mr. Francis Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The additional income tax liability in 1991-92 would be about £50 million. This estimate does not take account of any behavioural changes which might result from the introduction of the new arrangements.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much in real terms the average annual tax payments of a man with no allowances and reliefs other than the married couple's tax allowance earning *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £10,000, *(c)* £15,000 and *(d)* £20,000 has increased or decreased since 1976-77.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Income tax for a married man as a percentage of gross income is as follows:

Income in 1990-91 £	*Income tax*[1] *1990-91 per cent.*	*1976-77*[2] *per cent.*
5,000	1·4	3·4
10,000	13·2	19·2
15,000	17·1	24·5
20,000	19·1	27·1

[1] Assuming that the only allowances and reliefs available are the married man's allowance in 1976-77 and the personal allowance plus the married couple's allowance in 1990-91. In each case the wife is assumed to have no income.

[2] Calculations for 1976-77 are based on the income tax regime for that year applied to levels of income adjusted from the 1990-91 figures in line with the change in average male earnings.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Stations (Closures)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of local police stations that have closed since 1979 for each year and the location for each one.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not recorded centrally.

Judiciary (Training)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the commencement date and duration of training for magistrates, justices' clerks, probation officers and judges following the changes outlined in the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Consideration is still being given to what training programmes are necessary to support the Criminal Justice Bill. In the case of judges and magistrates it will be for the Judicial Studies Board in the first instance, to prepare plans or proposals.

Probation Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected increase in the probation service budget for 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Probation service budgets are set by probation committees, though the paying local authorities may object to certain items of expenditure and either a local authority or a probation committee may seek a determination of a budget from the Secretary of State. Central Government support for the probation service (current and capital grants and credit approvals to local authorities) is estimated to be £231 million in 1990-91. Planned provision, subject to the approval of Parliament, is £248 million for 1991-92 and £270 million for 1992-93. Grant is not necessarily paid in the same year as that in which the expenditure it supports is incurred.

Nigerian Offenders

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who emanated from Nigeria and who were jailed following a conviction for drug-related offences have been deported since October 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Thirty Nigerian nationals convicted of drugs-related offences were deported from the United Kingdom in the period 1 October 1990 to 23 January 1991. Separate figures are not readily available for those who served a custodial sentence, nor are details available centrally of the country of embarkation of those arrested on arrival.

Parole

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he anticipates that the parole changes proposed in the Criminal Justice Bill will be implemented; and whether they will be retrospective.

Mrs. Rumbold: The new parole arrangements will be introduced as early as practicable in 1992. The main

elements of the new scheme will apply only to those inmates who are sentenced after implementation date. Those sentenced previously will retain their old entitlements and will not be subject to any additional liabilities.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received any representations from the chairman of the Parole Board about the effects of the proposed changes to the parole system which are contained in the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mrs. Rumbold: The chairman of the Parole Board submitted representations which were subsequently published in the Parole Board's annual report for 1989. A joint Home Office-Parole Board conference was held last July when the board offered further comments on a number of issues concerning the new arrangements.

Hillsborough Disaster

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *491*, if he will make it his policy to introduce in the current Session the legislation to implement the recommendations contained in Lord Justice Taylor's final report into the Hillsborough disaster announced by him on 12 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *355*.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We propose to create offences along the lines recommended by Lord Justice Taylor as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Young Offenders

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average weekly cost of holding a juvenile on remand in penal custody in England and Wales during the latest financial year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on remand prisoners is not held separately.

The average weekly cost of holding a juvenile in a closed youth establishment in 1989-90 was £346.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile males were charged with *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* burglary, *(d)* robbery, *(e)* theft and handling stolen goods, *(f)* criminal damage, *(g)* drug offences and *(h)* motoring offences in England and Wales during 1989; and what percentage were remanded into custody.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The number of juvenile males proceeded against at magistrates courts for indictable offences in England and Wales in 1989 is given in the table:

Indictable offences	*Number of juvenile males proceeded against*
Violence against the person	4,739
Sexual offences	518
Burglary	9,470
Robbery	1,497
Theft and handling stolen goods	12,872
Fraud and forgery	370
Criminal damage	1,581
Drug offences	310
Other (excluding motoring)	1,734
Motoring offences	240
Total	33,331

These figures are published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales Supplementary tables 1989, volume 1, tables S1.1(B) and S1.1(C). Reliable information on the breakdown of remands into bail and custody according to age, sex and offence group is not available centrally.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the latest year available, how many juveniles appeared before magistrates courts in England and Wales; and what percentage was accompanied by one or both of their parents.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A total of 55,000 juveniles were proceeded against in magistrates courts in 1989. We have no information available centrally on the percentage who were accompanied by one or both of their parents.

HIV Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the latest date available how many prisoners in England and Wales were diagnosed as HIV positive; and how many prisoners in *(a)* Wormwood Scrubs, *(b)* Wandsworth, *(c)* Exeter, *(d)* Gloucester, *(e)* Bristol, *(f)* Birmingham, *(g)* Holloway and *(h)* Leeds were so diagnosed.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 23 January the number of reported cases was 56. For reasons of medical confidentiality it is not our policy to disclose the number of cases at individual establishments.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many medical practitioners are directly employed full or part-time by the prison medical service; and how many are contracted in from the national health service.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 116 are directly employed full-time and 118 part-time. Fourteen consultant forensic psychiatrists provide a part-time service under contracts with health authorities. A further 212 medical practitioners in a range of specialties undertake regular sessions for the prison medical service. These are in the main NHS consultants but the contracts are with the individual practitioners, not their employing health authority.

Prisoners (Drug Offences)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male and female prisoners in England and Wales are currently serving a sentence or are on remand for offences involving the importation of drugs.

Mrs. Rumbold: The only readily available information on the types of drug offences committed by sentenced

prisoners does not separately identify males and females; it is published annually in Prison statistics England and Wales (Table 1(a) of the latest volume, for 1989, Cm.1221), copies of which are in the Library. On 30 June 1989 an estimated 1,300 prisoners had been sentenced for unlawful import/export of drugs.

Information about the remand population by type of offence is not available centrally. The readily available information gives the offences of persons received on remand into Prison Service establishments (table 2.11 of Prison Statistics England and Wales 1989).

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male and female prisoners who are serving a sentence for drug related matters and who emanated from Nigeria have been *(a)* granted parole, *(b)* refused parole on first application and *(c)* refused parole on second application during the last three years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The present central computer system on parole does not hold information on the nationality of prisoners and it is not, therefore, possible to produce the figures requested. However, a new system is scheduled for this year which will make such analyses possible.

Electronic Monitoring

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a site has been found for the fourth electronic monitoring remand pilot which was announced last spring; and when the project will commence.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In the light of the successful outcome of the trials of the feasibility of electronic monitoring carried out in three areas as reported in Home Office research study No. 120 we concluded that a further trial would not be necessary.

Night Restriction Orders

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each of the last five years how many night restriction orders were made by the courts in England and Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information on the number of persons given a supervision order with night restrictions is given in the table.

Persons given a supervision order with night restrictions at all courts 1985-89
England and Wales

Year	*Total*
1985	3
1986	9
1987	10
1988	8
1989	11

This information is published annually in volume 4 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables", copies of which are in the Library.

Immigration Rules

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make changes in the immigration rules.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[pursuant to his answer, 21 January 1991, column 8]:* Under the immigration rules, Lebanese nationals are required to obtain visas to enter the United Kingdom. However, like most nationalities subject to a visa requirement, Lebanese nationals at present benefit from a concession whereby passengers who are booked on an onward flight leaving the United Kingdom within 24 hours of their arrival do not need visas. Because of the misuse of the concession by Lebanese nationals who are not genuine transit passengers, we have decided to withdraw it with effect from 26 January. From that date, all Lebanese nationals intending to pass through immigration control, including transit passengers, will need to obtain a visa before setting out.

HEALTH

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the decision to cease compiling central figures on the average number of NHS occupied hospital beds;

(2) if he will resume the compilation of central statistics on the occupancy of NHS hospital beds.

Mr. Dorrell: The health services information steering group (chaired by Mrs.. Korner) recommended that the central collection of aggregated bed occupancy figures should cease as it is not a meaningful indicator of efficient bed use. The measure derived from this information took no account of beds occupied by day case patients nor the fact that some wards are designed for short stay acute cases and others for very long stay geriatric and psychiatric cases. More relevant indicators such as throughput and length of stay are calculated from individual patient episode information and included in Health Service Indicators published by the Department. The latter also includes information about unoccupied beds in the mental illness and mental handicap specialties.

Quality of Care Exhibition

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to public funds of the quality of care exhibition held at the national exhibition centre in November.

Mr. Dorrell: Direct expenditure by the Department was £123,123 and by the 14 English regions and Wales, £522,788, a total of £645,911. More than 20,000 staff visited the exhibition over three days. The enormous amount of interest and enthusiasm generated will have long term benefits for staff and patients alike.

Form E111

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to remind the French authorities of the unlimited validity of forms E111 issued in the United Kingdom provided the holders continue to be ordinarily resident here.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has written to the French authorities about this matter and a reply is awaited.

Young Offenders

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for the latest date available how many juveniles are in the care of local authorities in England and Wales following a conviction for a criminal offence; and what were the offences.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 31 March 1989, 2,100 juveniles were in the care of local authorities in England under section 1(2)f or section 7(7) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 following a conviction for a criminal offence. Figures for 1989 are provisional. No information is available centrally about the nature of these offences. The Children Act 1989 will end the power of a court to make a care order as a result of a criminal offence; this power has, in any case, been exercised less and less by courts in recent years.

The information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure units and places therein for juveniles are currently available in England and Wales; and what is the geographical location and the occupancy rate.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 31 December 1990 there were 34 local authority secure units available in England, providing a total of 288 places. Their geographical location is given in the table.

The latest information about occupancy rates is given in the publication "Children Accommodated in Secure Units During the Year Ending 31 March 1989—England", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

England

Local authority	*Number of secure places on 31 December 1990*
Avon	20
Berkshire	4
Birmingham	4
Cambridgeshire	6
Cheshire	6
Coventry	8
Derbyshire	7
Devon	12
Durham	50
East Sussex	5
Greenwich	3
Hammersmith	16
Hampshire	11
Hertfordshire	2
Hillingdon	9
Lancashire	38
Leeds	27
Lincolnshire	4
Liverpool	17
Newham	6
Northumberland	5
Oxfordshire	3
Rotherham	4
Salford	7
Southwark	8
West Sussex	6

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to the newly established hospital trusts on whether they need a salaried chairman and or; how much remuneration should be paid for a particular input of time or expertise; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, each NHS trust is a corporate body with a board of directors including a chairman who is appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and receives remuneration for his work. Chairmen are expected to commit up to three and a half days per week to their duties for the trust. The amount of remuneration (which is shown in the table) is determined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, based on the reported revenue expenditure of the trust. Guidance on the membership and proceedings of NHS trusts was issued to potential NHS trusts in November 1990 together with the NHS Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990. Copies are in the Library.

NHS Trust Chairmen (England) remuneration 1 January 1991

Band	*Remuneration (£)*
1	17,610
2	15,659
3	13,812

Band 1—Units with reported revenue expenditure (1988-89 actual) in excess of £50 million.

Band 2—Units with reported revenue expenditure (1988-89 actual) £20 million to £50 million or with expenditure of less than £20 million but with a teaching function specified in the establishment order.

Band 3—Units with reported revenue expenditure (1988-89 actual) of less than £20 million.

Northwick Park Hospital

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has yet received a report from the steering group set up to consider the implications for the local health service of the closure of the clinical research centre at Northwick Park hospital.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following the creation of this steering group, announced in my predecessor's reply on 9 March 1990 at column 898, it has made two reports to Ministers. The group concluded that the phased closure of the clinical research centre by 1994 would allow enough time to secure an orderly withdrawal with minimum disruption to the local health service. Further work is proceeding on a range of options for using the premises vacated when the centre closes. Copies of the steering group's final report are available in the Library.

While I understand that the closure of the clinical research centre will disappoint many of those who have contributed to its work with Northwick Park hospital, I welcome the Medical Research Council's announcement of proposals to strengthen clinical research by the Royal

Post-Graduate Medical School (RPMS) at the Hammersmith hospital and seven other centres in Great Britain.

Care Models

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department have given any consideration to the development of models of care along the lines of Swedish service apartments.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* The development in this country of this particular model of care has not been considered by the Department.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what specific measures his Ministry has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Ministry intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Ministry's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Curry: This Department is taking a number of steps to improve energy efficiency. The farm and conservation grant scheme provides grants to farmers for energy saving amounting to 25 per cent. of costs in less favoured areas and 15 per cent. in other areas. Grants are paid to help meet the cost of the supply and installation of wind or water powered pumps and generators, solar heating panels, straw burning boilers and furnaces and on other forms of durable energy saving equipment and the permanent thermal insulation of buildings and glass-houses. Advice is available on energy saving from the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service and in particular energy audits are available which analyse fuel use and make specific recommendations for action.

Within the Department we have a continuing programme of energy efficiency improvement including the carrying out of comprehensive energy surveys in buildings. Improvements have been made to lighting, glazing and insulation and in some instances heating systems are being updated or overhauled. Energy saving changes have been made to laboratory installations.

This Department's expenditure on energy for the 1989-90 financial year was as follows:

	£ million
Electricity	1·8
Gas	0·4
Solid and liquid fuel	0·7

As the 1990-91 financial year is not yet over, the comparative figures requested are not available.

DEFENCE

Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the proven cases of fraud at his establishments discovered by the National Audit Office, together with the value of each fraud; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The National Audit Office did not discover any cases of fraud at defence establishments. The Comptroller and Auditor General's report on fraud and irregularities at defence establishments listed frauds which had been discovered and reported by the Ministry of Defence. The report will be examined by the Public Accounts Committee in the usual way.

Tornado F3 (Fuel Tank Loss)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received as to the incident involving the loss of fuel tanks from a Royal Air Force Tornado F3 aircraft, after taking off from RAF Leeming on 15 January.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On 15 January, two external fuel tanks on a Tornado F3 aircraft were inadvertently released shortly after take off from RAF Leeming. The tanks landed in a field. The pilot returned immediately to RAF Leeming. The incident is currently the subject of a unit inquiry.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by year for the last five years and to date *(a)* the number of service personnel and *(b)* the number of aircraft, stationed at RAF Finningley; and how many of these were attached from other nations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 54 aircraft and 1,096 service personnel stationed at RAF Finningley. Three of these personnel are on exchange from other nations. We do not hold records of the exact numbers of aircraft and personnel in previous years, but recent figures will be broadly similar to the current ones.

Oral Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings his Department would make were no notice given of oral questions to Ministers and they were answered without civil service time being used on briefings.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No savings would be made and costs would almost certainly increase significantly. If the oral question is known in advance briefing can be tightly focused, thus avoiding the cost of producing a detailed brief, covering all subjects that could possibly arise.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of time taken and the average cost involved of officials' time in his Department preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The time taken in preparing ministerial briefs for oral parliamentary questions is not routinely recorded in the Ministry of Defence. Estimates are however made where there is a likelihood of exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold (currently £250). However, following an inter-departmental exercise in 1972 an assessment was made of the average cost throughout all Departments of answering an oral question. This assessment was based on staff time, using average rates of pay and associated costs for the grades concerned, together with a share of the cost of parliamentary sections and any substantial non-staff costs such as computer usage. This assessed figure is regularly updated and currently stands at £99.

Iraq (Arms Sales)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the policy of the Government towards the selling of arms by the United Kingdom to Iraq since 1980.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government have refused to allow the export of lethal defence equipment to Iraq since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. This restriction was maintained after the ceasefire in 1988 and has now been overtaken by the total trade embargo agreed by the United Nations.

Iraqi Service Men (Training)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy which applied to the training of Iraqi soldiers and airmen undertaken in the United Kingdom prior to the invasion of Kuwait, the numbers involved each year and the kind of training given to the members of the Iraqi armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Her Majesty's Government take all relevant factors into account, including the treatment of human rights in the countries concerned, when considering the provision of military training. So far as the details of MOD training for Iraqis is concerned, I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 16 January at column 501.

Foreign Service Men (Training)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weight is given to a country's human rights record in deciding on whether military training is given in the United Kingdom to foreign service men; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In deciding whether or not to provide military training to overseas countries, Her Majesty's Government take all relevant factors into account, including the treatment of human rights in the country concerned.

Postal Services

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the supply of forces air mail envelopes to post offices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A further 3 million forces free airletter forms ("blueys") are being made available by the Ministry of Defence, and the Post Office is distributing them to areas of shortage as a matter of urgency. Since the start of the British deployment to the Gulf some 6 million blueys have been made available to the Post Office, of which about 1 million have been posted.

Gulf (Costs)

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *149-50*, if he has yet placed in the Library a copy of his letter to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neil) on the costs of the operation in the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: A copy of my letter to the hon. Member was placed in the Library on 24 January 1991.

SCOTLAND

Schools Expenditure

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the capital expenditure on local authority schools in each year since 1979-80 in cash and constant terms.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on Tuesday 22 January 1991 at column 144.

Homelessness

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what money is being allocated to Renfrew district council, Inverclyde district council and Strathclyde regional council to deal with homelessness.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional housing capital allocations for 1991-92 issued to Renfrew and Inverclyde district councils are as follows:

£ million

	HRA block[1]	*Non-HRA block*[2]	*Total*
Renfrew District	17·604	3·957	21·561
Inverclyde District	7·756	2·850	10·606

[1] For capital investment in council housing.
[2] For capital investment in private housing.

These resources are not specifically earmarked to deal with homelessness, but the authorities may use relevant allocations for homelessness where this is seen as a local priority.

In addition support to revenue expenditure will be made available in 1991-92 through housing support grant to Renfrew and Inverclyde district councils to fund the estimated deficit on their hostels in 1991-92 (£28,500 and £153,000, respectively); and through aggregate external finance to Renfrew and Inverclyde district councils and Strathclyde regional council.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses Scottish Homes has allocated to provide homes to those people on the homeless list of Scottish local authorities; and if he will list them by constituency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Homes does not hold this information centrally. However, I understand that Scottish Homes is currently, in partnership with local authorities, actively seeking to establish the most effective way of reducing the number of homeless and roofless people, including the provision of more furnished and supported accommodation for young single homeless people.

Storm Damage

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to deal with the aftermath of the recent storms in Scotland; and what money will be made available to local councils to prevent similar damage occurring again.

Mr. Allan Stewart: On 8 January, in response to the severe storms of the weekend of 5-6 January in the west of

Scotland, my right hon. Friend triggered a scheme of special financial assistance, known as the Bellwin scheme, in support of all local authorities in the area.

The scheme is designed to assist authorities financially in their response to the storms and the task of returning matters to normality. My Department has sent a circular to all the relevant local authorities setting out the details. Any eligible costs which authorities incur up to 8 March will be considered for assistance and I shall, of course, be as sympathetic as I can within the rules of the scheme.

Longer term prevention plans are a matter for individual local authorities and should be included in their forward financial plans for capital expenditure. Capital expenditure on flood prevention and coast expenditure comes within the provision for water and sewerage, which has been substantially increased. Local authorities have scope to undertake flood prevention and coast protection measures if they so wish.

Sports Facilities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sports facilities required by Her Majesty's Government to be available to all pupils in Scotland in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools as part of or as a necessary complement, to their curricula.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for the relevant education authority.

Scottish Legal Aid Board

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names and terms of office of the present members of the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

	From	*To*
Chairman		
Mr. Donald B. Grant, CBE, TD, LLD, CA	20 October 1986	31 March 1991
Members		
Mr. Brian G. Donald, LLB	17 November 1986	31 March 1992
Mr. Archibald Gilchrist	17 November 1986	31 March 1994
Mr. Graham H. Speirs, LLB	17 November 1986	31 March 1992
Mr. George Barrie, CA	1 December 1986	31 March 1994
Professor Thomas F. Carbery, OBE	1 December 1986	31 March 1992
Mr. Robert J. Livingstone	6 September 1988	31 March 1992
Mr. George D. Holmes, CB	1 October 1989	31 March 1992
Mr. David A. Leitch	1 October 1989	31 March 1992
Sheriff Robert G. McEwan, QC	1 October 1989	31 March 1992
Mr. Colin N. McEachran. QC	1 February 1990	31 March 1994
Miss M. Lynda Clark, QC	1 April 1990	31 March 1994
Mrs. Christine Davis	1 April 1990	31 March 1994
Mrs. Isobel G. McColl, WS	1 April 1990	31 March 1994
Mrs. Margaret Tait	1 May 1990	31 March 1994

Police Authorities

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state by rank the establishment of each of the police authorities in Scotland and the number of vacancies in each rank in each authority.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table details the authorised establishment levels and vacancies as at 31 December 1990 by police force and rank. Vacancies are calculated as authorised establishment less actual strength and take no account of the fact that authorities are allowed to recruit over authorised establishment to replace officers on central service (though practice in this regard varies). This explains why some vacancies have negative values.

Area	*Rank*								
	Chief Constable	*Deputy Chief Constable*	*Assistant Chief Constable*	*Chief Superintendent*	*Superintendent*	*Chief Inspector*	*Inspector*	*Sergeant*	*Constable*
Central									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	—	3	5	10	27	84	507
Vacancies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Dumfries and Galloway									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	—	1	4	5	18	54	277
Vacancies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
Fife									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	1	5	7	13	35	105	612
Vacancies	—	1	—	2	−2	3	3	−3	23
Grampian									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	1	7	12	21	59	175	881
Vacancies	—	—	—	—	—	—	−1	—	21

Area	Rank: Chief Constable	Deputy Chief Constable	Assistant Chief Constable	Chief Superintendent	Superintendent	Chief Inspector	Inspector	Sergeant	Constable
Lothian and Borders									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	3	13	22	40	116	333	1,958
Vacancies	—	—	—	−1	−1	−7	−10	−28	71
Northern									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	—	4	6	15	24	105	475
Vacancies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−4	3
Strathclyde									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	6	33	75	123	364	974	5,377
Vacancies	—	—	—	−3	—	2	3	3	146
Tayside									
Authorised Establishment	1	1	1	6	10	16	53	154	794
Vacancies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Scotland									
Authorised Establishment	8	8	12	72	141	243	696	1,994	10,881
Vacancies	—	1	—	−2	−3	−2	−5	−31	291

Chief Constables

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the salaries of the chief constables in each of the police authorities in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current salaries of chief constables are as follows:

Police force	Salary with effect from 1 September 1990 £
Central Scotland police	48,015
Dumfries and Galloway constabulary	48,015
Fife Constabulary	[1]48,828
Grampian police	51,267
Lothian and Borders police	53,298
Northern constabulary	48,015
Strathclyde police	61,029
Tayside police	[1]48,828

[1] Includes a personal salary supplement of £813 per annum.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state by rank the establishment for each of the fire authorities in Scotland and the numbers of vacancies in each rank in each authority.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is collected on an annual basis. The figures as at 31 December 1989 were published in table 1 of the annual report for 1989 of Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services for Scotland (Cm 1144), a copy of which is held in the Library. The figures as at 31 December 1990 are currently being collected and I will send the information to the hon. and learned Member as soon as it has been received and collated.

Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of students in each of the colleges in the centrally-funded sector of higher education in Scotland, including the colleges of education in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91, and the projected intakes for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The available information is given in the table. Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available. It is not the practice to publish projections of student numbers for individual colleges.

Students in Higher Education in SOED Centrally Funded Institutions in Scotland by Individual Institution

Institution	1988-89 Full Time	1988-89 Part Time	1989-90 Full Time	1989-90 Part Time
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology	3,444	437	3,906	622
Dundee Institute of Technology	1,983	199	2,088	290
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	1,073	12	1,188	10
Edinburgh College of Art	978	180	1,062	152
Queen Margaret College	1,376	88	1,522	204
Napier Polytechnic	5,221	3,807	4,905	3,510
Scottish College of Textiles	665	52	642	41
Queen's College, Glasgow	981	47	1,260	116
Glasgow School of Art	816	162	920	202
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	375	—	425	—
Glasgow College of Technology	3,535	2,542	3,749	2,657
Paisley College of Technology	2,971	1,345	3,072	1,902
The Northern College	866	104	1,055	73
Moray House College of Education	1,388	150	1,563	60
Jordanhill College of Education	1,286	675	1,518	669
Craigie College of Education	278	—	327	—
St. Andrew's College	555	—	669	—
SCOTLAND TOTAL	27,791	9,800	29,871	10,508

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the unit of resource attached to each full-time equivalent students through the grant-in-aid allocations to the centrally-funded sector colleges in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 and the intended unit of resource for 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grant-in-aid per full-time equivalent funded student in the centrally funded college sector in Scotland is given in the table. Because of the technical adjustments made to grant-in-aid to accommodate the shift of resources towards student tuition fees, the figures for the years shown are not on a comparable basis.

Financial Year			
[1] *1988-89*	*1989-90*	[2] *1990-91*	[3] *1991-92*
[4]—	£3,736	£3,441	[5]—

[1]A new system of grant based on funded student numbers was introduced in 1989-90.
[2]In 1990-91 the factors used to convert part-time and sandwich course funded students into full-time equivalents were changed.
[3]Grant-in-aid and funded student numbers for 1991-92 will be announced shortly.
[4]Not applicable.
[5]Not available.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were unemployed in Scotland in December of every year since 1979 *(a)* using the current system of calculating unemployment and *(b)* using the system of calculating unemployment current in 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Department of Employment publishes seasonally adjusted estimates of the number unemployed in Scotland monthly on a basis consistent with the current system of calculating unemployment. Estimates for December of each year since 1979 are available from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary.

Estimates are not available using the system of calculating unemployment current in 1979. There is no reliable basis on which to make such estimates as it is impossible to know how many people would now register as unemployed under procedures which no longer exist. Attempting to do so would involve speculation about the effect of demographic, economic and other factors.

The Gulf (Blood Donors)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken to ensure that blood donations made for the purpose of helping people wounded in the Gulf war are not used for other purposes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I wish to record the Government's appreciation and gratitude to the public for their magnificent response to the appeal for blood donors at this time of possible additional demand. All blood donations are freely given and on the understanding that these will be used by the Scottish national blood transfusion service to the maximum effect to save lives or in the treatment of patients in Scotland. Donations will be used to meet the demands of the national health service and Her Majesty's forces when required.

National Health Service Expenditure

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total national health service gross expenditure in Scotland in each year from 1986-87 to 1990-91; what is the estimated expenditure for 1991-92; if he will break down this expenditure for *(a)* hospital and community health services, *(b)* capital building and maintenance, *(c)* family practitioner services and *(d)* centrally financed services, giving the percentage increase/decrease on the previous year; and if he will provide these figures for each health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information in the format requested is not fully available. Details of gross expenditure for Scotland, in cash terms, from 1986-87 to 1991-92, along with a breakdown by service and showing the year on year percentage increases are given in the following table. As regards the individual health board figures I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on Tuesday 22 January, at column *139*, and will write to her with details for previous years where they are available.

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*		*1991-92*	
	Expenditure	*Expenditure*	*Percentage increase*	*Expenditure*	*Percentage increase*	*Expenditure*	*Percentage increase*	*Expenditure*[1]	*Percentage increase*	*Expenditure*[2]	*Percentage increase*[3]
Hospital and community health services; current	1,475	1,606	9	1,784	11	1,907	7	2,062	8	2,245	9
Hospital and community health services; capital	104	107	3	117	9	157	34	180	15	209	16
Family practitioner services	440	485	10	545	12	582	7	665	14	719	8
Centrally financed services	124	129	4	145	12	174	20	196	13	210	7
TOTAL	2,144	2,328	9	2,591	11	2,819	9	3,102	10	3,383	9

Figures do not sum to the total due to roundings.
[1] Provisional.
[2] Planned expenditure.
[3] These figures have been affected by the movement of resources from current to capital, to account for the new definition of capital expenditure.

Campbletown and Oban Hospitals

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the funding for the new Campbletown and Oban hospitals is still allocated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 January 1991]:* Details of capital allocations for all health boards for 1991-92 were announced on 22 January. Argyll and Clyde health board's allocation of £11·385 million includes provision for Oban and Campbletown hospitals.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Visas

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what was the number of people awaiting interview for a visa to enter the United Kingdom at British High Commission offices in Pakistan on 14 January;

(2) what was the number of women waiting for interview for a visa to join their husband in the United Kingdom at British High Commission offices in Pakistan on 14 January;

(3) what was the number of men waiting for interview for a visa to join their wife in the United Kingdom at British High Commission offices in Pakistan on 14 January;

(4) what is the average waiting time for interview for a person seeking an entry visa to enter the United Kingdom at British High Commission offices in Pakistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 14 January 1991, the number of people awaiting an interview for a visa at the British High Commission offices in Pakistan was 3,787. The number of wives awaiting interview to join their husbands in the United Kingdom was 1,343 and the number of husbands awaiting interview to join their wives was 1,245. The average waiting time on 14 January for an interview for a visa at the British High Commission offices in Pakistan was as follows:

Queue	*Islamabad*	*Karachi*
1	3 months	1 month
2	5 months	4 months
3	8 months	4 months
4	15 months	8 months
5	4 days	same day

The queues are organised as follows:

Queue 1 Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.
Queue 2 All spouses and all children under 18 years.
Queue 3 Fiancé(e)s and others applying for first time settlement.
Queue 4 Reapplicants.
Queue 5 Visitors and other non-settlement applicants.

Baltic States

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he has made to the Government of the Soviet Union concerning the Baltic states, following the killings of four civilians in Riga; what action he will recommend to the Council of Ministers of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs summoned the Soviet chargé on 21 January to underline our concern over the latest events. We have agreed with our partners in the EC that EC aid to the Soviet Union (except purely humanitarian) will not go ahead as long as the present situation continues. On behalf of the Twelve, the Luxembourg Fresidency has invoked the CDH mechanism, which enables CSCE countries to raise cases of human rights abuses.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the military action and threat by the Yugoslav Government against the people and elected authorities of Slovenia and other states within Yugoslavia; what representations he has made to the Yugoslav Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 25 January I summoned the Yugoslav chargé d'affaires and made it clear to him that we would deplore any use or threat of force against the democratically elected governments of Slovenia and Croatia, and that any disputes should be resolved by peaceful negotiation.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the functions and role of the Privy Council.

Mr. MacGregor: The functions of the Privy Council are legislative, judicial and executive. In its legislative role the Privy Council provides the machinery for the exercise of certain powers of the royal prerogative now confined almost entirely to the fields of the dependent territories, Crown servants, and the grant of legal personality by the approval of royal charters of incorporation. Much the larger part of the Council's legislative role is in the exercise of the wide range of powers conferred by statute on the sovereign in Council or directly on the Council itself.

The judicial functions of the Privy Council are exercised by the Council's judicial committee which acts as the supreme court of appeal from courts of some Commonwealth countries which have retained this right of appeal, from courts of dependent territories and from those of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The judicial committee also exercises an appellate jurisdiction in respect of disciplinary proceedings in certain professions and certain decisions made by authorities of the Church of England.

The executive functions of the Privy Council also derive from both the royal prerogative of which the most important are the sovereign's powers to prorogue and dissolve Parliament, and statute. The rest largely comprise responsibility for a wide variety of appointments including the formalities of appointment of various Cabinet and other Ministers, high sheriffs, members of various statutory bodies, Her Majesty's inspector of schools, and members of university courts and councils.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will increase the present threshold for answering *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions from right hon. and hon. Members, in line with the current inflation figure; when the threshold was last increased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The disproportionate cost threshold has stood at £250 since 1988 when it was increased from £200. The figure, which applies to both written and oral questions, is reviewed annually in the light of cost increases and a further increase will be implemented when this is seen to be necessary.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 January 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an estimate of the cost of setting up and running the agency for administering the magistrates courts centrally, as suggested by his Department's scrutiny committee; and what are the comparisons with existing costs.

Mr. John Patten: Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte was appointed last year to prepare such an assessment. Its report was completed in September and I refer the hon. Member to the copy that was placed in the Library at the time.

Police Searches

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Leicestershire on the circumstances surrounding the search of the home of the hon. Member for Leicester, East's constituent Mr. Peach, of 15 Rushey close, Leicester.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable of the Leicestershire constabulary that there is no record of a search being made of the home of Mr. Peach at the address given.

Women's Issues

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total annual cost of convening the ministerial group on women's issues.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that this information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are on the secretariat of the ministerial group on women's issues.

Mrs. Rumbold: At present servicing the ministerial group is part of the duty of five members of staff, the equivalent of three and a half full-time posts.

Prison Boilers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total oil-fired boiler capacity within Her Majesty's prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, in the year 1989-90, 41·6 per cent. of the total energy used in Her Majesty's prisons was derived from oil, representing 609,440 megawatt hours. Virtually all this would have been produced by oil-fired boilers.

Criminal Procedure (Insanity) Act

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the Criminal Procedure (Insanity) Act 1964 with particular reference to the length of time people may be detained without trial; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government have reviewed the 1964 Act in the light of recommendations made by the Butler committee on mentally abnormal offenders which reported in 1975. The Government recognise that it is desirable to amend the Act by providing for an examination by a court of the case against an accused person found unfit to plead. Under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983, a person admitted to hospital following a finding of unfit to plead under the provisions of the 1964 Act may apply to a mental health review tribunal for his discharge in the first six months of his detention and at specified intervals thereafter.

Age of Consent

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the age of consent in each European Community country for heterosexuals, male homosexuals and female homosexuals; and if he will say what consideration he is giving to the possibility of harmonising such laws within the European Community.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not readily available and I will write to my hon. Friend. But the treaty of Rome authorises no harmonisation role for the European Community in this sort of area.

Television Licence Fee (Evasion)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were committed to remand centres by individual name in 1989 and 1990 for the non-payment of fines for evasion of the television licence fee, detailing in each case the amount of the fine, the length of imprisonment and whether other offences of a similar or different nature were considered at the same time; and whether he will estimate the cost to public funds of imprisonment in each year.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Broadcasting Ownership

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received following his announcement on 4 December 1990 about his proposed supplementary broadcasting ownership rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others about the proposals in my announcement on 4 December relating to dual ownership of Channel 3 licences. Some of those who wrote to me supported these proposals, but a number urged me to consider restricting co-ownership of licences for adjacent areas. I have now decided that, in addition to the proposals that I set out in that announcement, it will initially not be possible for a single person to control two

licence areas that are contiguous. Two licence areas will be deemed to be contiguous if they are adjacent with a significant land border between them. This restriction will last only until the beginning of 1992. Between then and the end of 1993 all takeovers of Channel 3 licences will, by virtue of section 21 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, be prohibited unless they have the prior approval of the Independent Television Commission. Thereafter, it will be possible for a licensee to acquire a contiguous neighbour through takeover, provided that the two licences in question were not both in respect of areas designated as large.

Broadcasting (Sporting Events)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what list he has drawn up for the purposes of section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Following consultation with broadcasters, the rights holders of the events concerned, the Sports Council and the Central Council of Physical Recreation, I have drawn up a list including 10 events. These are the same as the events included in the list drawn up for the purposes of section 14 of the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 which were set out in a written answer on 12 July 1985. They are:

(1) The Commonwealth Games when held in the United Kingdom.
(2) Cricket Test Matches involving England.
(3) The Derby horse race.
(4) The FIFA World Cup Finals.
(5) The FA Cup Final.
(6) The Grand National horse race.
(7) The Olympic Games.
(8) The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.
(9) The Wimbledon Tennis Championships.
(10) Additionally in Scotland, the Scottish FA Cup Final.

I am continuing to consult the interests concerned over possible changes to the list and will announce my conclusions in due course.

Bomb Scares

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice is given to police forces about how they should involve the owners and/or managers of *(a)* private property and *(b)* public property when searching for explosive material during a bomb scare.

Mr. Lloyd *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* Advice is given to police forces by the crime prevention centre at Stafford. However, the nature of the advice given by police forces will depend on local circumstances and needs. Crime prevention officers are attached to all forces and they will be glad to give advice to anyone who seeks it on the searching of buildings for explosive material during bomb scares.

Police Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable for the number of personnel employed by South Yorkshire police authority *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each division or equivalent, for each year since 1979, distinguishing civilian personnel separately.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The tables show the available information. No records were kept of the strength at divisional level before 1982 or of civilian staff strength at divisional level before 1985.

South Yorkshire Police
Table 1
Police and civilian strength (at 31 December)

	Police	*Civilian*	*Total*
1979	2,644	863	3,507
1980	2,842	891	3,733
1981	2,874	800	3,674
1982	2,875	768	3,643
1983	2,858	789	3,647
1984	2,873	871	3,744
1985	2,850	818	3,668
1986	2,846	939	3,785
1987	2,934	947	3,881
1988	2,941	977	3,918
1989	2,941	1,004	3,945
1990	2,981	1,020	4,001

Table 2
Strength by police division
(at 31 December)

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
A Division									
Police	479	452	488	490	509	497	504	491	490
Civilian	—	—	—	116	138	136	133	135	138
B Division									
Police	378	361	369	375	385	386	386	397	392
Civilian	—	—	—	90	98	97	97	101	107
C Division									
Police	378	364	380	380	378	386	388	383	392
Civilian	—	—	—	87	108	112	112	107	110
D Division									
Police	453	448	454	453	443	438	456	446	455
Civilian	—	—	—	78	89	83	82	82	83
E Division									
Police	281	283	284	286	285	299	300	294	298
Civilian	—	—	—	56	57	57	56	54	54

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
F Division									
Police	285	277	284	281	286	293	304	304	304
Civilian	—	—	—	54	62	60	63	65	64
Headquarters									
Police	569	646	558	524	524	555	560	577	594
Civilian	—	—	—	335	387	402	434	460	464
Recruits in training	52	27	56	61	36	80	43	49	56

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Summons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what guidelines he has issued to the Treasury Solicitor on his appearance at magistrates courts for hearings relating to applications for private summons taken out against Government Ministers.

The Attorney-General: None. The Treasury Solicitor handles such matters in accordance with the ordinary arrangements for the representation of Government Ministers in relation to legal proceedings by or against them in an official capacity.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what was the cost to public funds of the appearance of the Treasury Solicitor at a hearing in Bath and Wansdyke magistrates court in 1990 relating to an application for a private summons taken out by Diana Francis and Joan Staines against the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

The Attorney-General: The cost to public funds was £796·80.

Marital Rape

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General what powers are available to the prosecuting authorities where the anonymity of a victim of marital rape is prejudiced as a result of publication or broadcast of the name of the accused.

The Attorney-General: Under section 4 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976, as amended by section 158 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, after a person is accused of a rape offence it is an offence to publish or broadcast matter likely to lead members of the public to identify a woman as the complainant in relation to that accusation. The publication or broadcast of the name of a husband accused of raping his wife is likely in particular cases to lead to the identification of the complainant. The prohibition applies during the whole of the woman's lifetime, unless the courts make a specific direction to the contrary. It is a defence that the woman has given written consent for the matter to appear, but the defence is not available if any person has unreasonably interfered with her peace or comfort with intent to obtain the consent. The maximum penalty is a £2,000 fine.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General what was the average waiting time from the appeal being made against an attendance allowance decision and the appeal decision for the years 1988, 1989 and 1990.

The Attorney-General: The office of the social security commissioners does not record information on the average waiting times for decisions on appeals in relation to individual categories of benefit.

PRIME MINISTER

Lithuania and Latvia

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make direct representations to the President of the Soviet Union concerning recent actions by the Soviet Government in Lithuania and Latvia; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We have made our concerns known very clearly to the Soviet authorities, both bilaterally and in conjunction with partners and allies. There should be no doubt of our condemnation of the actions of Soviet troops in Vilnius and Riga and their tragic consequences. We call urgently on the Soviet authorities to withdraw their troops and to negotiate seriously with the elected authorities in the Baltic states.

Lobby Reporters

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if he will change the terms under which parliamentary lobby reporters are briefed by his press secretary so that information may be attributed to the Prime Minister's office in place of Government sources.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Saudi Arabia (Mail)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will take steps to ensure that mail can be got through to United Kingdom civilians working in Saudi Arabia from their families, using military postal facilities if necessary and where possible.

The Prime Minister: In spite of delays caused by difficulties with air services, the Post Office is making every effort to operate the best possible service to Saudi Arabia and mail is getting through. The Ministry of Defence would be willing to consider what help it could provide, if this becomes necessary.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will bring forward proposals to institute a system for notifying *(a)* Parliament and *(b)* the electorate when the royal prerogative has been exercised;

(2) if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to ensure that the authority of Parliament is required for *(a)* the declaration or continuation of war and *(b)* other exercises of the royal prerogative;

(3) if he will bring forward legislative proposals to introduce ministerial responsibility to Parliament for the powers currently exercised by the royal prerogative.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* No.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements exist for the Prime Minister to be notified when the royal prerogative is used.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* With very few exceptions, the royal prerogative comprises powers that are now exercised by Ministers subject to the constitutional conventions.

Declaration of War

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what would be the effects of an official declaration of war on the maintenance of an Iraqi diplomatic capability in the United Kingdom;

(2) whether the United Kingdom is at war with Iraq;

(3) what representations he has received concerning parliamentary consideration of the declaration of war.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The United Kingdom is not in a state of war with Iraq. British forces are engaged, together with the armed forces of Kuwait and other coalition partners, in hostilities against Iraq under the authority of the United Nations Security Council. The rules of international law applying in cases of armed conflict apply to these hostilities, notably the Geneva protocol of 1925 and the four Geneva conventions of 1949. We will observe our obligations under those treaties scrupulously and expect the Government of Iraq to do the same.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Advisory Companies

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *571*, if he will list the wide range of groups from which he seeks advice on presentational aspects of policy; which of them are paid and which unpaid; what are their terms of reference in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: A complete list of all groups from which the FCO seeks advice could be compiled only at disproprtionate cost. The following are illustrative examples:

Mr. E. R. I. Allan OBE, is employed as a consultant to advise on British official participation in international exhibitions.

The British Atlantic Committee and Peace Through NATO advise on the presentation of defence and disarmament issues. This advice is informal and unpaid although BAC and PTN do receive grant aid from the government.

Hariri Page were commissioned in 1990 to advise on methods of evaluating information work overseas, including market research techniques, targeting, training and reporting procedures.

Moon Communications has recently completed a consultancy on the management of FCO publications. This included the production of a design manual to ensure consistency of presentation, advice on specific publications and technical assistance on visual presentation.

Shandwick PLC have provided advice on an informal and unpaid basis on public and media response to the Gulf Crisis. Young and Rubicam have provided advice on public perceptions of the crisis on the same basis.

Latvia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Soviet ambassador about the situation in Latvia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs summoned the Soviet chargé on 21 January to underline our concern over the actions of Soviet troops in Riga on 20 January which resulted in a number of deaths. He again urged the Soviet authorities to withdraw their troops from the streets in the Baltic republics and to engage in serious negotiation with the democratically elected authorities in the republics.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Reading Standards

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what studies have been undertaken into the connection between standards of reading in primary schools and borrowing levels of books from public libraries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of no such studies.

GCSE

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the proportions of pupils gaining grades A to C in General Certificate of Secondary Education in (i) English, (ii) mathematics and (iii) a modern language in 1990, by rank order of education authority.

Mr. Fallon: Information for 1990 is not yet available. The table gives information for leavers from maintained schools, for each local education authority, aggregated over the three years 1987-89.

Maintained school leavers in England
Aggregation over 1987, 1988, 1989
Percentage of leavers with grades A-C at GCSE/O-level/CSE

Local education authority	*Modern foreign languages*	*rank*	*Mathematics*	*rank*	*English*	*rank*
Barking	5·3	(95)	17·5	(93)	25·8	(95)
Barnet	25·8	(4)	44·5	(1)	50·5	(4)
Bexley	14·5	(47)	33·6	(16)	41·3	(32)
Brent	14·8	(44)	27·0	(63)	39·0	(44)
Bromley	18·1	(19)	33·1	(22)	43·8	(18)

Local education authority	Modern foreign languages	rank	Mathematics	rank	English	rank
Croydon	14·3	(50)	26·8	(66)	39·5	(41)
Ealing	11·1	(82)	27·0	(62)	32·1	(79)
Enfield	18·8	(16)	33·3	(19)	42·1	(27)
Haringey	10·8	(84)	19·3	(91)	29·9	(89)
Harrow	18·1	(18)	41·0	(3)	55·2	(1)
Havering	12·7	(68)	29·7	(46)	39·3	(42)
Hillingdon	12·0	(73)	31·6	(32)	37·8	(54)
Hounslow	15·7	(38)	30·4	(42)	40·3	(39)
Kingston upon Thames	20·8	(9)	32·6	(27)	50·3	(5)
Merton	17·6	(24)	30·1	(44)	38·3	(50)
Newham	9·0	(92)	18·9	(92)	29·0	(91)
Redbridge	13·8	(54)	30·1	(45)	38·2	(51)
Richmond upon Thames	23·2	(6)	36·0	(10)	44·3	(15)
Sutton	29·1	(1)	43·7	(2)	50·3	(6)
Waltham Forest	9·7	(90)	16·2	(95)	26·2	(93)
Birmingham	12·2	(70)	21·2	(84)	32·9	(77)
Coventry	11·5	(79)	25·1	(72)	34·8	(67)
Dudley	16·0	(35)	28·0	(55)	36·8	(63)
Sandwell	8·1	(93)	16·5	(94)	26·1	(94)
Solihull	20·5	(10)	34·6	(13)	45·8	(11)
Walsall	14·0	(53)	24·2	(76)	34·8	(68)
Wolverhampton	11·6	(75)	20·8	(86)	32·5	(78)
Knowsley	3·9	(96)	14·4	(96)	18·9	(96)
Liverpool	10·8	(83)	20·6	(88)	31·2	(84)
St. Helens	13·5	(59)	26·9	(64)	33·1	(76)
Sefton	16·3	(34)	29·4	(48)	43·3	(20)
Wirral	17·1	(27)	29·6	(47)	40·8	(38)
Bolton	16·7	(30)	33·3	(18)	43·0	(23)
Bury	14·4	(49)	35·3	(12)	43·1	(22)
Manchester	9·9	(89)	20·1	(89)	28·3	(92)
Oldham	13·3	(64)	22·2	(82)	29·0	(90)
Rochdale	10·5	(85)	25·1	(73)	34·7	(69)
Salford	12·2	(72)	24·7	(75)	37·7	(56)
Stockport	16·9	(29)	33·1	(24)	46·9	(8)
Tameside	14·4	(48)	30·7	(39)	41·1	(34)
Trafford	26·1	(3)	35·8	(11)	44·1	(16)
Wigan	19·2	(15)	33·1	(23)	40·9	(36)
Barnsley	10·3	(86)	23·3	(77)	30·5	(87)
Doncaster	11·2	(80)	26·8	(65)	31·7	(81)
Rotherham	14·7	(45)	25·7	(70)	34·4	(70)
Sheffield	13·7	(57)	25·0	(74)	37·6	(57)
Bradford	13·4	(61)	20·8	(85)	31·3	(83)
Calderdale	13·2	(65)	22·8	(78)	34·2	(71)
Kirklees	17·6	(25)	27·2	(60)	37·8	(53)
Leeds	14·5	(46)	25·2	(71)	34·0	(75)
Wakefield	11·5	(78)	22·3	(81)	31·3	(82)
Gateshead	10·1	(78)	22·1	(83)	30·4	(88)
Newcastle upon Tyne	12·2	(69)	20·7	(87)	31·8	(80)
North Tyneside	13·7	(56)	28·0	(54)	39·7	(40)
South Tyneside	12·9	(67)	27·9	(57)	34·2	(72)
Sunderland	9·7	(91)	22·4	(79)	31·0	(85)
Inner London Education Authority	10·1	(88)	20·1	(90)	30·8	(86)
Avon	15·6	(39)	30·2	(43)	42·1	(26)
Befordshire	14·2	(51)	27·9	(56)	39·0	(45)
Berkshire	21·3	(7)	36·3	(9)	44·4	(14)
Buckinghamshire	26·8	(2)	39·1	(5)	49·2	(7)
Cambridgeshire	20·2	(12)	30·8	(37)	41·2	(33)
Cheshire	17·8	(21)	30·6	(40)	41·6	(30)
Cleveland	13·6	(58)	29·2	(51)	36·5	(65)
Cornwall[1]	14·2	(52)	33·1	(21)	45·7	(13)
Cumbria	15·3	(41)	32·5	(29)	36·9	(62)
Derbyshire	13·4	(62)	28·8	(52)	36·9	(60)
Devon	13·3	(63)	29·3	(49)	39·2	(43)
Dorset	17·8	(22)	31·5	(33)	42·2	(25)
Durham	11·2	(81)	26·0	(69)	35·7	(66)
East Sussex	15·9	(36)	33·5	(17)	45·7	(12)
Essex	17·4	(26)	34·2	(14)	41·6	(28)
Gloucestershire	19·8	(13)	32·7	(26)	43·9	(17)
Hampshire	16·4	(32)	34·1	(15)	41·6	(29)
Hereford and Worcester	16·7	(31)	30·8	(36)	42·4	(24)
Hertfordshire	21·3	(8)	36·9	(7)	46·8	(9)
Humberside	13·8	(55)	26·7	(67)	34·1	(73)
Isle of Wight	7·2	(94)	22·3	(80)	34·0	(74)
Kent	18·0	(20)	32·5	(30)	41·0	(35)
Lancashire	15·9	(37)	30·5	(41)	38·3	(49)
Leicestershire	11·5	(77)	29·2	(50)	38·6	(47)
Lincolnshire	16·9	(28)	31·4	(34)	38·1	(52)

Local education authority	*Modern foreign languages*	*rank*	*Mathematics*	*rank*	*English*	*rank*
Norfolk	13·4	(60)	32·5	(28)	37·8	(55)
North Yorkshire	23·8	(5)	36·6	(8)	45·9	(10)
Northamptonshire	11·6	(76)	26·5	(68)	36·9	(61)
Northumberland	15·1	(42)	32·8	(25)	41·6	(31)
Nottinghamshire	12·2	(71)	27·1	(61)	36·5	(64)
Oxfordshire	16·4	(33)	31·8	(31)	40·8	(37)
Shropshire	17·7	(23)	31·1	(35)	43·3	(21)
Somerset	15·5	(40)	30·7	(38)	38·5	(48)
Staffordshire	13·2	(66)	27·2	(59)	37·0	(59)
Suffolk	11·9	(74)	27·7	(58)	37·0	(58)
Surrey	19·8	(14)	39·6	(4)	52·9	(2)
Warwickshire	18·4	(17)	33·2	(20)	43·6	(19)
West Sussex	20·3	(11)	38·1	(6)	50·5	(3)
Wiltshire	14·8	(43)	28·7	(53)	38·7	(46)
ENGLAND	15·3		29·4		38·9	

[1] Includes the Isles of Scilly.

Local Authority Borrowing

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the increase or decrease in local authority borrowing power for education for each local education authority for the next financial year in order of *(a)* cash magnitude and *(b)* as a percentage of last year's borrowing power.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is shown in the table. No conclusions should, however, be drawn from a comparison of annual capital guidelines received by an LEA in any two years. Our distribution of annual capital guidelines is made on the basis of the consistent application of objective criteria and each LEA's annual capital guidelines reflects the extent to which its plans for spending on schools and colleges match these criteria in the year in question.

LEA	*Changes between 1990-91 and 1991-92 Annual Capital Guidelines in order of cash magnitude*	*LEA*	*Difference between 1990-91 and 1991-92 Annual Capital Guidelines in order of percentage change compared to 1990-91 Annual Capital Guidelines*
	£000s		*Percentage*
Leeds	13,810	Leeds	539
Essex	8,315	Kingston	386
East Sussex	8,149	Kirklees	212
Kent	7,563	Hounslow	181
Derbyshire	6,678	Wolverhampton	164
Dudley	5,900	Dudley	164
Oldham	5,093	Gateshead	163
Lancashire	4,265	Oldham	149
Rochdale	3,994	Bromley	117
Hampshire	3,193	Lewisham	104
Wigan	3,085	Rochdale	98
Tower Hamlets	3,078	East Sussex	95
Newham	3,016	Croydon	88
Oxfordshire	2,850	Northumberland	81
Lincoln	2,629	Brent	80
Kirklees	2,581	Oxfordshire	76
Buckinghamshire	2,580	Wigan	70
Northampton	2,460	Westminster	64
Staffordshire	2,268	Sunderland	63
Suffolk	2,067	Essex	60
Durham	1,987	Buckinghamshire	57
Bromley	1,972	Newham	54
Surrey	1,820	Bury	54
Gateshead	1,758	Manchester	53
Cumbria	1,699	Ealing	53
Manchester	1,635	Bexley	52
Northumberland	1,583	Enfield	50
Nottinghamshire	1,451	Newcastle	49
Wolverhampton	1,285	Surrey	49
Lewisham	1,280	Stockport	48
Sunderland	1,188	Kent	47
Kingston	1,035	Derbyshire	46
Hounslow	977	Durham	40
Croydon	935	Northampton	40
Newcastle	768	Tower Hamlets	40
Enfield	655	Nottinghamshire	39
Bexley	649	Lincoln	36
Stockport	619	Staffordshire	36
Birmingham	589	Suffolk	26

LEA	*Changes between 1990-91 and 1991-92 Annual Capital Guidelines in order of cash magnitude* £000s
Brent	546
Hereford and Worcestershire	526
Ealing	473
North Yorkshire	470
Bury	440
Sutton	390
Isle of Wight	351
Tameside	335
Shropshire	263
Westminster	244
Coventry	218
Hammersmith	188
Calderdale	147
Somerset	142
Warwickshire	137
Bolton	97
South Tyneside	94
Barking	88
Walsall	41
Sefton	32
Wirral	25
City[1]	2
Hertford	−2
Harrow	−17
Islington	−69
Barnet	−85
Norfolk	−100
Haringey	−114
West Sussex	−124
Solihull	−128
Hillingdon	−135
Isles of Scilly	−204
Cornwall	−280
Kensington	−300
Wandsworth	−304
Lambeth	−328
Sandwell	−334
Cleveland	−350
Bradford	−377
Richmond	−435
Bedfordshire	−436
Salford	−467
Doncaster	−485
North Tyneside	−536
Camden	−537
Rotherham	−550
Cheshire	−557
Hackney	−613
Humberside	−633
Avon	−707
Redbridge	−825
Knowsley	−907
Sheffield	−1,057
Barnsley	−1,077
Berkshire	−1,218
Dorset	−1,249
Wiltshire	−1,283
Gloucester	−1,475
St. Helens	−2,243
Merton	−2304
Wakefield	−3119
Greenwich	−3,173
Waltham	−3,274
Havering	−3,936
Liverpool	−3,979
Southwark	−4,171
Leicester	−4,232
Cambridge	−4,693
Devon	−5,269
Trafford	−5,765

LEA	*Difference between 1990-91 and 1991-92 Annual Capital Guidelines in order of percentage change compared to 1990-91 Annual Capital Guidelines Percentage*
Hampshire	24
Tameside	24
Lancashire	23
Cumbria	21
Isle of Wight	18
Barking	18
Hammersmith	18
Sutton	13
Bolton	12
North Yorkshire	11
Coventry	11
Calderdale	10
Warwickshire	9
Hereford and Worcestershire	8
Birmingham	6
South Tyneside	5
Shropshire	4
Walsall	3
Somerset	3
Sefton	1
Wirral	1
Hertford	−0
Harrow	−2
West Sussex	−3
Norfolk	−3
Bradford	−4
Cornwall	−4
Islington	−6
Humberside	−7
Solihull	−8
Barnet	−10
Cheshire	−10
Haringey	−10
Cleveland	−11
Hillingdon	−12
Salford	−12
Avon	−13
Kensington	−14
Bedfordshire	−18
Wandsworth	−18
Gloucester	−19
Sandwell	−20
Wiltshire	−21
Lambeth	−22
Hackney	−24
Berkshire	−27
Richmond	−31
Dorset	−32
Rotherham	−35
Cambridge	−35
Camden	−38
Leicester	−38
Devon	−41
Liverpool	−41
North Tyneside	−42
Sheffield	−44
Knowsley	−44
St. Helens	−44
Waltham	−49
Redbridge	−52
Doncaster	−56
Barnsley	−57
Wakefield	−58
Trafford	−61
Merton	−64
Havering	−67
Southwark	−77
Greenwich	−82
Isles of Scilly	−93

[1] CITY percentage not possible as 1990-91 ACG £0,000, 1991-92 ACG £2,000.

Note: It is important to note that Solihull, Cornwall and Tower Hamlets are to receive additional allocations as Supplementary Credit Approvals in 1991-92.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has taken in schools to discourage children from the abuse of solvents and lighter fuels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The orders for national curriculum science and technology require that pupils should understand the risks associated with abuse of solvents, their effects on the human body and the need for their safe storage and use. More broadly, the National Curriculum Council has recommended that solvent and other substance misuse should be a key component in schools' health education programmes. The Department of Education and Science is supporting up to £7 million LEA expenditure in 1990-91 on preventive health education, including education about solvent abuse; and has contributed funding towards the production of a schools' video and other resources on this subject. The Department has also issued guidance to LEAs and schools on the safe handling of volatile substances.

BA Fine Art Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many undergraduate places were available on full-time BA fine art courses in each of the years 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information is not held centrally on the number of places which, within the total resources at their disposal, institutions decide to make available.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the value for each local education authority, in 1990 prices, of discretionary awards for the years 1979-80, 1984-85 and the latest available year.

Mr. Eggar: The data requested are shown in the table.

£ thousands

Local education authority	*1979-80*	*1984-85*	*1988-89*
Barking	310	520	546
Barnet	1,412	1,039	493
Bexley	656	758	363
Brent	2,268	3,752	2,819
Bromley	905	714	805
Croydon	810	771	948
Ealing	1,518	943	1,425
Enfield	572	458	556
Haringey	85	1,158	[2]—
Harrow	742	537	518
Havering	806	537	514
Hillingdon	897	654	485
Hounslow	563	362	228
Kingston upon Thames	327	189	203
Merton	375	201	345
Newham	513	1,050	885
Redbridge	951	631	440
Richmond upon Thames	830	641	646
Sutton	663	386	307
Waltham Forest	760	593	753
ILEA	17,703	19,635	18,962
Birmingham	1,698	1,022	1,653
Coventry	972	1,077	650
Dudley	509	551	[1]—
Sandwell	658	849	1,010
Solihull	414	313	431
Walsall	585	366	1,202
Wolverhampton	377	479	384
Knowsley	959	1,528	1,111
Liverpool	2,213	2,914	2,689
St. Helens	295	312	744
Sefton	635	673	672
Wirral	1,035	1,643	1,445
Bolton	1,109	1,315	1,063
Bury	871	955	1,225
Manchester	2,764	2,026	[2]—
Oldham	390	782	838
Rochdale	619	414	732
Salford	972	1,160	780
Stockport	1,271	618	1,085
Tameside	468	437	360
Trafford	600	576	884
Wigan	814	225	415
Barnsley	611	739	1,229
Doncaster	788	865	778
Rotherham	[1]—	323	116
Sheffield	1,661	2,600	4,178
Bradford	2,207	2,306	2,702
Calderdale	487	490	555
Kirklees	1,403	2,438	2,738
Leeds	1,852	1,881	2,999
Wakefield	457	987	[2]—
Gateshead	490	408	501
Newcastle upon Tyne	788	478	460
North Tyneside	905	1,158	1,049
South Tyneside	383	435	650
Sunderland	881	1,447	1,397
Isles of Scilly	50	1	1
Avon	2,479	3,732	5,228
Bedfordshire	1,245	1,021	1,380
Berkshire	1,451	2,060	2,748
Buckinghamshire	1,670	1,512	1,676
Cambridgeshire	1,514	1,576	1,560
Cheshire	2,967	4,196	4,600
Cleveland	1,321	2,577	3,397
Cornwall	1,765	508	2,316
Cumbria	1,479	2,197	3,013
Derbyshire	1,910	3,364	2,932
Devon	3,920	4,773	5,077
Dorset	2,278	3,222	4,014
Durham	728	1,487	1,693
East Sussex	3,387	1,094	1,265
Essex	12,925	4,519	4,190
Gloucestershire	2,569	2,999	2,857
Hampshire	6,662	4,836	6,172
Hereford and Worcester	1,559	1,534	1,310
Hertfordshire	3,589	3,212	3,694
Humberside	3,309	4,526	4,456
Isle of Wight	468	476	481
Kent	6,081	[1]—	4,787
Lancashire	3,725	7,221	6,748
Leicestershire	2,276	4,696	5,691
Lincolnshire	1,254	2,401	2,340
Norfolk	3,433	2,754	2,693
North Yorkshire	3,924	6,747	4,572
Northamptonshire	1,720	1,352	1,085
Northumberland	1,185	1,473	591
Nottinghamshire	3,671	5,776	4,408
Oxfordshire	1,605	1,323	1,715
Shropshire	1,503	1,721	1,813
Somerset	1,133	961	1,460
Staffordshire	279	2,913	2,820
Suffolk	2,296	2,403	2,323

Local education authority	1979-80	1984-85	1988-89
Surrey	4,020	2,121	1,912
Warwickshire	1,795	1,661	1,487
West Sussex	2,064	1,323	40
Wiltshire	1,962	2,397	1,919

Notes to table:

1. The data are based on R01 spending returns submitted by local authorities in England to the Department of the Environment.
2. [1] denotes cases in which authorities did not enter a sum on their spending returns. [2] denotes that data are not available because no spending return was received.
3. The data relate to spending on discretionary awards as currently categorised for the purpose of the spending returns, that is, spending on awards made under Section 1(6) or Section 2 of the Education Act 1962 (as amended) other than awards to 16-19 year olds.
4. The data have been repriced to 1990-91 prices using the current GDP deflators.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessments have been made by his Department of the likely impact on *(a)* teacher recruitment, *(b)* teacher retention and *(c)* wage rates of a decision by an individual local education authority to leave the national machinery for the determination of teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Eggar: The Government believe that individual local education authorities should be free to determine the pay and conditions of their teachers locally, subject to approval by the Secretary of State of a proposal from the authority to that effect. I should expect such an authority to take account of local prospects for recruitment and retention in setting salary levels.

Charging Regulations

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish his Department's survey of the implications of the charging regulations under the Education Reform Act 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 21 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *117*. The results of the survey will not now be available until February.

Marine Science and Technology

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to respond to the report of the co-ordinating committee for marine science and technology, published in 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today sent a copy of the Government's response to the committee's chairman. I have arranged for copies of the response to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to the report of the European Court of Auditors on European Community aid to Bangladesh; and what action will be taken by the United Kingdom as a result.

Mrs. Chalker: I have read with interest the European Court of Auditors' report on European Community aid to Bangladesh and the Commission's response to that report. A number of the criticisms contained in the ECA report reflect our own concerns about the need for improvements in the Commission's overall systems and practices. We shall pursue these concerns vigorously through the existing committee structure and in our bilateral contacts with the Commission.

Namibia

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support he is currently giving to new and expanding businesses and other job-creation schemes in Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: At the request of the Namibian Government, we have focused our assistance initially on education and police training. We are now exploring with the Government of Namibia the scope for assistance to other sectors and, in doing so, will take careful account of the possibilities for employment creation. I shall discuss our aid to Namibia with members of her Government during my two-day visit this week, and on my return report to the House if progress has been made.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid Her Majesty's Government gave in 1989 and 1990 for *(a)* Afghan refugees in Pakistan and *(b)* humanitarian and development needs within Afghanistan; what plans he has for future aid; and what estimates he has of the total aid provided by international donors in 1989, 1990, and commitments for 1991, for the support of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Mrs. Chalker: British aid for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and for humanitarian and development needs within Afghanistan, is provided through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations. Amounts provided in 1989 and 1990 are set out in the table. No decisions have yet been made on allocations for 1991.

	1989 £ million	[1]1990 £ million
Afghan refugees in Pakistan	4·8	3·2
Humanitarian and developmental needs within Afghanistan	2·5	1·1

[1] estimate

Decisions on future aid will be made in the light of developments in Afghanistan and the needs of the refugees.

Details of total aid provided by international donors for Afghan refugees in Pakistan are not available. The following figures for 1989, the latest year for which figures are available, have been provided by the major international agencies:—

	1989 (US$ Million)
UNHCR	
In Pakistan	37·4
In Afghanistan	3·8

	1989 (US$ Million)
Voluntary Repatriation Scheme	13·1
ICRC	
For activities within Afghanistan and in Pakistan	
Swiss Francs (million)	38

NATIONAL FINANCE

Bloodstock

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessments he has made of the implications for the bloodstock breeding industry of the changes to the administration of value added tax due to be introduced in January 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government are keenly aware of the problems which the bloodstock industry faces after 1992 due to the very low rates of VAT for bloodstock in France and Ireland. My right hon. Friend the then Paymaster General had discussions with representatives of the industry in November and I shall continue those discussions following a meeting which is to take place between the Horseracing Advisory Council and officials to consider possible solutions to the industry's perceived future difficulties.

Income Tax

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rise in income tax would be required to raise £3·6 million per day.

Mr. Maude: A yield of £3·6 million per day would be equivalent to an annual yield of about £1,300 million. Raising the basic rate of income tax by 1p would yield about £2 billion in a full year.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much income tax would have to be raised to cover expenditure of £1,008 million per calendar month.

Mr. Maude: A yield of £1,008 million per calendar month would be equivalent to an annual yield of about £12,100 million. Raising the basic rate of income tax by 6p would yield about £12,500 million in a full year.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate for *(a)* the increase in revenue from income tax and *(b)* the increase in revenue from VAT, in the event of a 1p reduction in basic rate of income tax; and what is his estimate for the same tax revenues in the event of a 1p reduction in higher rate of income tax.

Mr. Maude: The direct effects of a 1p change in the basic rate of income tax and a 1p change in the higher rate of income tax are given in chapter 4 of the 1990 autumn statement (Cm 1311). Estimates of the wider effects of tax changes depend on the economic model used and on assumptions about other economic policies.

Personal Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of personal income taken by *(a)* income tax, *(b)* national insurance contributions, *(c)* domestic rates/community charge and *(d)* value added tax, in 1979 and 1990.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Figures are not yet available in respect of 1990 for these items. The percentages in 1979 and 1989 are given in the table:

As a percentage of total personal income

	1979	1989
Income tax	12·7	12·2
National insurance contributions	6·8	7·5
Domestic rates/community charge	2·1	2·7
Value added tax	4·1	5·4

Tax and Benefit Systems

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the integration of the tax and benefit systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: This was discussed in chapter 6 of the 1986 Green Paper "The Reform of Personal Taxation" (Cmnd 9756). I cannot, however, anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, on the same basis as the ready reckoner published in the autumn statement, the effect on a one-earner, two-child family of spending in 1991-92 the same sum on *(a)* a cut in the basic rate of income tax, *(b)* raising income tax thresholds above their indexed levels, *(c)* raising child benefit assuming (i) no change in income support and family credit rates and (ii) corresponding changes in income support and family credit rates.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The effects of the various changes to income tax and child benefit on a married man on average earnings with two children are given in the table. In a full year each of the changes would cost £1·95 billion, the cost of a 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax. Estimates are based on projections of the 1988-89 survey of personal incomes in line with forecasts in the autumn statement.

Increase in income after tax[1] compared with indexation in 1991-92 for a married man[2] on average earnings[3] with two children

		£ per week
(a)	1p cut in basic rate	2·34
(b)	Increase in main income tax allowance	1·68
(c)	Increase in child benefit	
	(i) £6·30 per week per child[4]	12·60
	(ii) £3·07 per week per child[5]	6·14

[1] Disregarding any change to entitlement to social security income-related benefits except in item *(c)* (ii).
[2] Assumed to have no reliefs and allowances other than the personal allowance and the married couple's allowance.
[3] Average earnings assumed to be £334·1 per week.
[4] Assuming no change in income support and family credit children's rates.
[5] Assuming corresponding changes in income support and family credit children's rates.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the Treasury's current assumptions on the level of local government current spending in England, Scotland and Wales in 1991-92, showing how much of this is financed by central Government grant, non-domestic rates and community charge, both gross and net of rebates, indicating the assumed default rate for community charge.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* No assumptions have been made about the level of local authority current spending in 1991-92. But the Government have given an indication of the amount of revenue expenditure they believe would be appropriate for that year (total standard spending in England and Wales, and Government-supported expenditure in Scotland). The table shows this spending, together with the planned level of aggregate external finance, split into grant and non-domestic rate payments.

£ million

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*
Total Standard Spending[1]	39,000	5,447	2,433
Financed by:			
—Aggregate External Finance	26,050	4,353	1,936
of which			
Non-domestic rates	12,408	1,347	525
Grant	13,642	3,006	1,411
—Community charge (gross)	12,950	1,094	497

[1] Government Supported Expenditure in Scotland.

These calculations do not require any assumption about non-collection of the community charge. The latest estimate of the cost of community charge benefit in 1991-92 in Great Britain is just over £2 billion.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), *Official Report*, column *562*, what are his estimates of the savings on community charge benefit in 1991-92 as a result of the introduction of the community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* Some £300 million.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate, giving the date and amount in each case, any funds which the Treasury has made available to lessen the impact of the community charge since its inception and the total cost to date.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* Table 21.4.2 of the Government's expenditure plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cm. 1021) details transitional grants in Great Britain which have been made available as part of the introduction of the new local government finance regime. Table 21.4.4 shows funding under the community charge benefit scheme. Updated tables are due to be published in early February in the supplement to the autumn statement. Announcements to date have been:

April 1989
Adjustment to income related benefits to assist community charge payments £500 (GB).

19 July 1989
Inner London education Grant 1990-91 £100 million.
Low rateable value areas grant 1990-91 £100 million.

11 October 1989
Low rateable value areas grant to be aggregated with Area protection grant from 1991-92 onwards. 1991-92 £400 million, 1992-93 £200 milion, 1993-94 £85 million (England).
Transitional relief scheme for chargepayers, 1990-91 £300 million (England).
Community charge benefit for 1990-91 £2 billion.
Other income related benefits £0·5 billion.

6 November 1989
Transitional relief scheme (Wales) for 1990-91 £17·5 million.

13 November 1989
Additional grant of £30 million for Scotland 1990-91 to protect against withdrawal of the safety net.

19 July 1990
Transitional relief scheme for 1991-92 raised from £260 million to £570 million (England).

23 July 1990
Transitional relief (Wales) for 1991-92 and 1992-93 to be £20 million.

25 July 1990
Additional area protection grant (Scotland) for 1991-92 £15 million.

17 January 1991
Community charge reduction scheme. Additional funding 1991-92 of £1,200 million (England), £65 million (Scotland) and £42 million (Wales).

Media Advisory Service

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether the media advisory service is now operational;

(2) what role the media advisory service has in liaising with the Ministry of Defence;

(3) if he will list the members of the media advisory service;

(4) how many personnel, and at what grade, are employed by the media advisory service;

(5) what is the remit of the media advisory service; and under what guidelines does it operate;

(6) if he will describe the role of the media advisory service in relation to reports from the Gulf.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The media advisory service has not been activated during the present Gulf conflict. Its remit is to provide advice to media editors in time of tension and war. Personnel are not allocated to the media advisory service until it is activated. However, two members of staff of the Central Office of Information are engaged in the development of the service; one grade 5 and one senior executive officer.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Bankruptcies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers were declared bankrupt in each of the years 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Figures for bankruptcies in England and Wales for the agricultural and horticultural sectors from 1979 to date are as follows:

	No. of bankruptcies	per centage of total bankruptcies
1979	55	1·7
1980	50	1·3
1981	70	1·5
1982	78	1·5
1983	98	1·5
1984	155	2·0
1985	136	2·1
1986	130	1·9
1987	172	2·4
1988	162	2·1
1989	142	1·7
[1]1990	136	2·2

[1] first half.

Note: Figures from 1983 onwards were set out in 'Business Briefing' published by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce dated 9 November 1990. Previous figures were published in 'British Business' dated 29 April 1983 and 22 January 1982.

The balance sheet from British agriculture remains strong with liabilities representing less than a fifth of total assets.

Fisheries Regulations

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the disparity of fines for offences committed against fisheries regulations; and what plans he has for an overall sentencing framework for such offences.

Mr. Curry: The Department is currently reviewing the maximum level of fines for a number of fisheries offences to see whether they need increasing. The penalties imposed for fisheries offences within the maximum are a matter for the courts whose sentencing will take into account the circumstances of individual cases, including any factors pleaded in mitigation.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he plans to have with his EC counterparts on a coherent overall sentencing policy for offences committed against fishing regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Member states are responsible for the enforcement of EC fisheries regulations in their territories and fisheries limits and impose penalties for offences under national legislation.

Environmentally Friendly Farming

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will be taking to ensure that any system of direct payments per hectare will achieve environmental goals as well as social ones.

Mr. Curry: As my right hon. Friend the Minister made clear in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 23 January, at column *247*, we intend, in negotiations on any proposals for changes to the common agricultural policy, to argue for the closer integration of agricultural and environmental policies.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make representations to the EC Commission to ensure that the regulation EC COM(90)366 makes provision for member states compulsorily to introduce measures to ensure the continuation of environmentally friendly farming practices and the option of allowing the introduction of a scheme to reduce plant protection and fertilise inputs.

Mr. Curry: In line with our policies for designating environmentally and nitrate-sensitive areas, we favour an approach that permits the member states to target the provisions in EC(COM)366 at those areas where they would be likely to achieve the greatest environmental benefits.

ENVIRONMENT

City Grant Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total Government money awarded under the city grant scheme, breaking down the sum for each year and indicating how much was awarded by urban development corporations for each year; and how many jobs have been created under the city grant scheme.

Mr. Portillo: The amounts of city grant approved in each financial year since the scheme's introduction in May 1988 are shown in the table. The approvals from my Department in total, including projects not yet completed are expected to provide over 21,600 jobs and those from the urban development corporations over 9,400.

Year	£ million[1]	£ million[2]
1988-89	29·055	18·327
1989-90	72·636	11·0
[3]1990-91	42·330	25·485
Total	144·021	54·812

[1] City Grant from Department of the Environment.
[2] City Grant from the urban development corporations.
[3] to date.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the non-metropolitan district councils in England, in ranking order of their indebtedness, in the last year for which figures are available, with the figures for their debt and their population.

Mr. Key: I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library.

Community Charge

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from Mid-Bedfordshire district council as to the number of those liable for community charge who have not yet received any demand for payment.

Mr. Key: No information is collected centrally on the number of community charge demands sent out by local authorities.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue his Department's community charge practice notes to all current members of valuation and community charge tribunals.

Mr. Portillo: Each valuation and community charge tribunal has copies of the Department's practice notes on the community charge, which can be consulted by tribunal members if necessary.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much it costs to administer the collection of 20 per cent. poll tax payments due from those on income support.

Mr. Key: The total cost of collecting the community charge in the English local authorities is budgeted to be £413 million in 1990-91. Information is not available on the costs of administering the collection of community charges from those on income support.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many individuals have qualified for community charge transitional relief in Chelmsford in the current financial year to the latest available date.

Mr. Key: Relief grant claim forms from the local authority indicate that 16,500 charge payers in Chelmsford have benefited from transitional relief this financial year.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many individuals are liable to pay the community charge in Chelmsford in the current financial year;

(2) how many individuals have not paid any community charge in Chelmsford in the current financial year to the latest available date.

Mr. Key: Information reported by the local authority shows 117,000 people to be liable to make a payment in respect of a personal community charge by 31 December 1990; of these 4,000 had not made a payment.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing (i) the assumed poll tax he has assigned to each local authority for 1991-92 for the purposes of the community charge reduction scheme and (ii) the actual poll tax levied by each authority in 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* I am placing in the Library copies of a table showing the average personal community charge for each English authority in 1990-91 and the community charges which it is proposed should be used for calculating community charge reductions in 1991-92. In most cases the latter charges are derived from an authority's average personal community charge for 1990-91 adjusted to take account of the change in support per adult resulting from the replacement of the safety net and low rateable value areas grant by area protection grant. However, for a number of authorities such a calculation, if applied, would produce a charge less than the figure used as the basis of the calculation of transitional relief this year—the lower of an authority's 1990-91 actual and assumed personal community charges. In these cases, the 1990-91 figure for calculating transitional relief is to be used.

In all cases if the figure derived in the way described above is greater than the personal community charge set by the relevant authority for the financial year beginning on 1 April 1991, we propose that the latter should be used for calculating entitlement to a community charge reduction.

Glass and Glazing Federation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Glass and Glazing Federation to discuss *(a)* quality of workmanship and possible warranty or guarantee schemes and *(b)* glazing companies which cannot repair unsatisfactory work because they have gone into liquidation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has not met the Glass and Glazing Federation. However, my officials did so on 14 June 1989 to discuss these matters.

Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will be consulting non-governmental organisations and national bodies to assist in his preparations for the United Nations 1992 conference on environment and development.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 10 December to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), at column *266*.

ASRA Housing Association

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the London borough of Greenwich observes the conditions on nomination rights contained in his Department's consent of 27 November 1990 for the disposal of land at the rear of 52 to 86 Ceres road, SE18, to the ASRA (Greater London) Housing Association.

Mr. Yeo: It is the responsibility of the district auditor to keep under review the legality of an authority's transactions.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the nature conservation objectives of the countryside stewardship scheme; and what assessment he has made of the scheme's likely contribution to the fulfilment of international obligations under the EC Council directive on the conservation of wild birds—79/409/EEC—and the Berne convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats.

Mr. Trippier: Details of the countryside stewardship scheme are being worked up by the Countryside Commission in conjunction with my Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Nature Conservancy Council. The scheme is intended to enhance and recreate valued English landscapes and wildlife habitats and to improve opportunities for people to appreciate and enjoy them. The commission is very aware of the need properly to integrate nature conservation considerations with those of landscape and access and involved the Nature Conservancy Council in the design of the scheme from its inception.

The commission hopes to be in a position to start inviting applications to the scheme by late spring this year. Initially, countryside stewardship is likely to target chalk and limestone grasslands, heathland, waterside landscapes, coastal land and possibly some upland areas.

It is hoped that the scheme will, among other things, assist in conserving and recreating habitats of importance to species covered by the EC Council directive on the conservation of wild birds and the Berne convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats.

Recycling

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his Department's criteria for recycling and recovery; and what is being done to encourage each, in light of forthcoming obligations outlined in the EC directive on waste management.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's criteria for recycling and recovery are that they should take place where it makes environmental and economic sense to do so. Our policy and actions on these matters are set out in chapter 14 of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance"—CM 1200.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions are required in contracts entered into by waste collection authorities and recyclers in respect of retention by a county council or waste disposal authority offering recycling facilities for the same materials.

Mr. Baldry: None. Section 14(2) of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 allows waste collection and disposal authorities to agree the extent to which the former may retain waste for re-use or reclamation. Section 48(2) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will replace that provision with a permission for any waste collection authority to retain waste for the purpose of recycling unless the waste disposal authority has made arrangements with a contractor for recycling that waste and has served notice on the collection authority accordingly. Waste disposal authorities do not acquire more than a small proportion of household or commercial waste direct from the producers of the waste; most is handled first by the waste collection authority or a private waste collection company.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he received in response to his consultation paper about business rating and bed-and-breakfast accommodation; what was the balance of the various proposals outlined and submitted; and the details of the options he considered prior to his final decision.

Mr. Portillo: We received 246 responses to the consultation paper. Taking into account the weight of responses from groups and bodies as opposed to individuals, the majority were in favour of an exemption for bed-and-breakfast operators who intended to offer accommodation in their own homes for up to six people. There was also majority support for the qualification that the exemption should apply only where use of the dwelling for bed and breakfast was subsidiary to its use as a residence. Besides the proposals set out in the consultation paper, we considered all options that were put to us in the responses.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table showing the cost to the Exchequer of enterprise zones in 1989-90 and the tax income forgone in 1989-90 for each enterprise zone.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* Compensation for rate revenue forgone by local authorities is listed in the table. The latest available estimate for capital allowances is £70 million for 1987-88; this figure is only a broad indication based on several assumptions and cannot be split between individual enterprise zones.

Compensation for rates revenue forgone in 1989-90

Enterprise zone	*£ million*
England	
Allerdale	0·168
Corby	4·623
Dudley	5·329
Glanford	0·229
Hartlepool	1·263
Isle of Dogs	16·776
Middlesbrough	1·106
North East Lancashire	2·424
North West Kent	4·764
Rotherham	2·656
Salford/Trafford	9·194
Scunthorpe	4·683
Speke	2·581
Telford	4·141
Tyneside	14·099
Wakefield	1·745
Wellingborough	1·831
Wales	
Delyn	0·763
Milford Haven	0·756
Swansea	3·038
Scotland	
Clydebank, Inverclyde	[1]2·747
Invergordon	0·246
Tayside	1·902
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	3·426
Londonderry	1·133
UNITED KINGDOM TOTAL	92·073

[1] Not available separately.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will institute procedures to ensure that in future in the event of any planning inquiry resulting from a call-in of a planning application where it is known or believed that both the applicant and the local planning authority are in support of the application, leading objectors to the application are given informal or formal notice of the date of the inquiry no later than the applicant and the local authority.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* It is normal practice to give official written notification of the date for an inquiry into a called-in planning application to all interested parties at the same time. It is necessary, though, to contact the applicant and the local planning authority beforehand in order to agree a date and venue for the inquiry. My right hon. Friend has no plans to alter these arrangements.

Reservists (Community Charge)

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the liability of reservists with regard to the poll tax during the period in which they are in the Gulf.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The advice issued to local authorities by my Department on 5 November 1990 about the community charge treatment of armed forces personnel serving in the Gulf indicated that it should also be applied to reservists. This would in general mean that their liability to the personal community charge should cease on the day that they are posted abroad and that no attempt to enforce payment of any sums outstanding in respect of their liability up to the date of posting should be made until their return. A copy of this advice has been placed in the Library of the House.

EC Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of European regional development fund grant received by area in Britain has gone to *(a)* finance debt redemption and *(b)* establish projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

I take it that the question relates to grants for local authority capital projects, which form the majority of ERDF grants in the United Kingdom,

Section 63(4) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires local authorities in England and Wales in effect to apply capital receipts from the ERDF to debt redemption. The immediate effect of receipt is therefore a cash benefit.

However, local authority capital programmes are, by virtue of ERDF grants, larger than they otherwise would be. Indirectly, therefore, ERDF grant finances additional capital expenditure.

The issue raised by the hon. Member's question, seeking to distinguish between debt redemption and investment, does not therefore arise.

TRANSPORT

Civil Defence

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the delays to work on underground accommodation which resulted in an underspend on his Department's civil defence budget for 1989-90; when he expects the work to be completed; what is his current estimate of expected total overall expenditure on this work; and what is the purpose of the accommodation and the nature of the work to be carried out on it.

Mr. McLoughlin: The funds granted were for building works and other services in existing underground accommodation which would be used, in crisis and war, by personnel concerned with supply and transport. The work was delayed pending a review of the use of the accommodation. A revised scheme is expected to be completed by 31 March 1991 at a total cost of £625,000.

Petrol Tankers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many people are killed or injured each year as a result of accidents involving petrol tankers;

(2) how many accidents occur each year involving petrol tankers.

Mr. Chope: I regret that the information requested is not available because the standard report form, STATS19, completed by the police for accidents involving personal injury does not identify petrol tankers as a specific category of vehicle.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals there are to require the strengthening and protection of petrol tankers to prevent rupture in the event of a road traffic accident.

Mr. Chope: None of which I am aware; all designs for petrol tankers must be approved by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the safety of petrol tankers.

Mr. Chope: None in the last two years.

Hazardous Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of accidents involving the rail transportation of hazardous and inflammable materials that have taken place within a 50-mile radius of Doncaster, for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Her Majesty's railway inspectorate does not have information readily available in the form requested. The following figures, for the period 1984-89, are for train accidents occurring in eastern region within 50 miles of Doncaster in which it is possible to identify that dangerous or inflammable goods were carried on the train. Figures for incidents before 1984 are not available.

	Dangerous	*Inflammable*
1984	2	—
1985	—	1
1986	—	4
1987	—	1
1988	1	1
1989	—	—
1990	[1]	[1]

[1] Details not yet available.

Light Rapid Transport Systems

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local authorities which have consulted his Department about undertaking feasibility studies and planning light rapid transport or metro systems.

Mr. McLoughlin: Apart from the passenger transport executives in Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire, whose light rail projects are already under way, passenger transport executives and local authorities have been in touch with the Department about light rapid transit projects in a number of areas including the West Midlands,

Leeds, Avon, Cleveland, Chester, Croydon, Guildford, Leicester, Nottingham, South Hampshire, Southampton and Stoke-on-Trent.

Mail Movements

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has carried out any environmental studies into the impact of the Post Office's recent decision to move short-distance mail by road instead of rail.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. This was a commercial matter for the Post Office and British Rail.

Black Country Spine Road

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when an announcement is to be made on the results of the review of the black country spine road.

Mr. Chope: The report has not yet been received. When it is, it will be considered as quickly as possible.

Rail Investment

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy to evaluate the public service obligation grant to make it more specific in application, rail line by rail line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The current system of paying a single national public service obligation grant reflects the requirement on BR to maintain a service which is comparable generally with that existing on 1 April 1988. The day-to-day management of services and the precise level of service to be provided on individual lines is a matter for BR. The Department regularly considers whether this system is appropriate. However, there are no current plans to change it.

Rail Deaths

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any inquiry will be conducted into the deaths of rail passengers who fell from InterCity trains when doors opened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) on 5 December last, *Hansard*, Vol. 182, column 118. British Rail thoroughly investigates all incidents of this nature and makes its reports available to Her Majesty's railway inspectorate.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans have been put to him for improvement of the west coast main line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is continuing to develop plans for the west coast main line and has not yet put specific investment proposals to the Department.

Trains (Overbooking)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received in the last year concerning the safety implications of overcrowding and double booking on British Rail trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department of Transport received around 4,000 letters about British Rail in the last year, some of which raised questions about various aspects of overcrowding. Precise figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how old the information is about local unemployment provided by the employment service to local TECs.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the relationship and co-ordination between the employment service and local TECs.

Mr. Jackson: The employment service and training and enterprise councils share a common purpose in helping local labour markets to run efficiently. It is vital that local employment service managers and individual TECs establish a relationship based on the closest possible co-operation to ensure that we maximise the contribution that each can make.

Most TECs have been operating for only a short time. However, there are already many excellent examples of collaboration to build on which will support a fully co-ordinated approach to the delivery of Government employment, training and enterprise programmes and services at the local level. I know that the employment service is committed to helping TECs succeed and I am encouraged by the response by individual TECs and the very constructive dialogue which has emerged.

The Government will continue to take a very keen interest in this important area.

Disability

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list recent measures to encourage blind people and the registered disabled to obtain skills or to find employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: People with disabilities, including visual handicaps, can register as disabled if they want to work and have a reasonable prospect of being able to obtain and keep work. Registration is open to unemployed people and to those in employment. My Department provides a wide range of services and schemes specifically designed to help people with disabilities to obtain training and to find and keep employment and develop within it. In addition, the general employment and training schemes and services provided by the Department often make special provision for people with disabilities. Some provision is specifically aimed at people with visual handicaps.

My Department has recently undertaken a wide-ranging consultation exercise to obtain views on how to make the Department's services more effective for people with disabilities and we are presently considering responses. We are also consulting widely about the range

of special schemes that we provide for people with disabilities, including special help for people who are visually handicapped and for people who are registered disabled.

My right hon. and learned Friend announced in November that, from this April, unemployed people with disabilities will be given priority access to the Department's main employment and training programmes. These programmes include job clubs and the job interview guarantee scheme, both of which are to be expanded and have been shown to have considerable potential in helping people with disabilities.

In October we launched a new symbol which can be used by employers to show publicly that they are committed to good practices and to encourage people with disabilities in seeking and keeping employment.

Self-employed People

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change, in numerical and percentage terms, in the number of self-employed people in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Great Britain between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: The information is as follows:

Self-employed
change between June 1979 and September 1990

	Actual (000's)	*Percentage*
Scotland	90	56·3
Great Britain	1,515	82·2

Earnings

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average weekly earnings of full-time male employees in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Great Britain.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is published in table 12 of part A of the 1990 new earnings survey report. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the hourly rates of pay for *(a)* part-time female manual employees and *(b)* part-time female non-manual employees, in (i) Scotland and (ii) Great Britain.

Mr. Jackson: Information on average gross hourly earnings for the groups specified is published in table 180 of part F of the 1990 new earnings survey report. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what support Her Majesty's Government are giving or planning to give to both sides of industry to enable them to take full advantage of a work force estimated to comprise 45 per cent. women by the year 2001.

Mr. Jackson: The Government are firmly committed to the principle of equal opportunities for women and men and will continue to encourage both sides of industry, through education and training, to do all they can to help women reach their full potential. Employers are being urged to adopt family-friendly policies to attract and retain the women they will need.

Training

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list recent measures taken by him to encourage industry to reinvest in training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Many of our policies on training are designed to encourage effective investment by employers in training. The establishment of training and enterprise councils in England and Wales, and local enterprise companies in Scotland, has put employers in the lead in transforming attitudes towards training and enterprise locally. TECs and LECs are developing new approaches to encouraging employers to invest more effectively in training. TECs have recently been given new freedoms to use their substantial public resources more flexibly to this end. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has also launched "Investors in People", a new standard for effective investment in skills by employers.

These and other measures will reinforce the increasing commitment by employers to training, demonstrated by the substantial growth in recent years in the number of employees receiving training shown by the labour force survey.

Job Interviews

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to amend the rules for covering the cost of the unemployed travelling for job interviews to take account of seasonal jobs lasting less than 12 months.

Mr. Jackson: The travel-to-interview scheme aims to secure permanent jobs for unemployed people by improving the match, in the economy, between labour supply and demand, encouraging unemployed people to apply for jobs beyond daily travelling distance which they would not otherwise have considered. It is through focusing the scheme on permanent jobs that I believe the greatest impact can be obtained from the resources available and I do not therefore think it right to change the rules so as to bring seasonal jobs into scope.

Braille

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many braille terminals and printers for personal computers which can be operated on a stand-alone basis or linked as work stations to larger stations there are in his Department.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* My Department devolves much responsibility for purchasing equipment to individual managers. Comprehensive records are not kept centrally, so a definitive reply could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I can provide the following information.

There are three braille terminals and four braille printers for personal computers which can be operated on a stand-alone basis or linked to larger systems. In addition,

there are at least 14 personal computers with attachments, such as speech synthesisers, which facilitate their use by visually handicapped staff.

My Department also provides other specialised equipment for use by visually handicapped staff but which does not involve the use of personal computers. This equipment includes devices for producing braille print.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in full the areas of Britain that are classified as *(a)* objective 1, *(b)* objective 2 and *(c)* objective 5b, as shown in the allocation of European regional development fund money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The areas of the United Kingdom designated for objectives 1, 2 and 5(b) of the European Community structural funds are as follows:

Objective 1

Northern Ireland.

Objective 2

The Assisted Areas of Great Britain, except those designated for Objective 5(b) and the following travel-to-work areas (TTWAs)—Birmingham (part), Bridgend (part), Cardiff (part) Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye, Corby, Coventry and Hinckley (part), Dudley and Sandwell (part), Kidderminster, Sheffield (part) and Whitby.

The remainder of Greater Manchester; Nottingham City (UPA); Midlothian Local Authority District (LAD) and part of East Lothian LAD; and the following TTWAs: Alnwick and Amble, Alfreton and Ashfield (part), Burnley, Burton on Trent (part), Castleford and Pontefract, Chesterfield, Goole and Selby (part), Mansfield, Pendle, Retford, Stirling (part), Wakefield and Dewsbury, Whitehaven and Worksop.

Objective 5(b)

The Highlands and Islands Development Board area;

The intermediate areas of Galloway, comprising Stranraer, Newton Stewart and Stewartry TTWAs;

The counties of Dyfed, Powys and Gwynedd, excluding the assisted areas adjacent to West Glamorgan and Gwent —which are designated for Objective 2—and the part of the Conwy and Colwyn TTWA in Gwynedd;

The assisted areas of Devon and Cornwall.

The Commission is understood to be considering whether to review the objective 2 list, pursuant to regulation (EEC) No. 2052/88, article 9(6). The Government believe that there should be no changes to the list at present.

Office Furniture

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) why his Department has awarded its new Buckinham Palace road offices' furniture contract to a manufacturer outside the United Kingdom;

(2) what are his criteria for the awarding of office furniture contracts within his Department.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is concerned to buy goods and services which meet its specifications at the best price. In view of our treaty commitments to the EC and GATT, the country of origin could not be of primary concern in the assessment.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the present economic situation in the office furniture manufacturing and supply industry.

Mr. Leigh: In recent years the office furniture manufacturing industry has expanded strongly. The performance of the industry in future will be influenced both by developments in the economy generally and by the extent to which it meets the needs of its customers.

Municipal Mutual Insurance Ltd.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department collects any statistics regarding the number of claims made by local authorities on behalf of their residents against Municipal Mutual Insurance Ltd., and the outcome of such claims.

Mr. Redwood: No. The return to my Department identifies the number of claims by class of business, but they are not analysed between types of policyholder.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he collects statistics about premium payments from local authorities to Municipal Mutual Insurance Ltd.

Mr. Redwood: No. The returns to my Department do not identify the source of premium payments.

Film Industry

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is Her Majesty's Government's policy for encouraging the film industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: The Government provide annual support including £2 million for British Screen Finance Ltd., £1·75 million for the national film and television school and £75,000 for the Scottish production fund and are setting up the European co-production fund, with £5 million over the next three financial years. We also support the British Film Institute, the Scottish Film Council, the Arts Council's film activities in Northern Ireland and training. The Government participate in the European Community's EDIA programme and the audio-visual EUREKA programme.

Home Accident Surveillance System

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the annual report on the home accident surveillance system.

Mr. Leigh: The annual report for 1988 has been published and I am placing copies in the Library of the House.

Engineering Steel Exports

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what figures he has available for the latest period for engineering steel exports; and what were the comparable figures one year previously.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 January 1991]*: "Engineering steel" has no precise definition within United Kingdom product classifications. It has been approximated in the table by the tariff codes 72.13-72.15, 72.28.30 and 72.28.60:

Engineering Steel Exports

	Tonnes '000s	£ million
January to November 1989	1,012	302
January to November 1990	1,231	376
Increase (per cent.)	21·6	24·6

British Technology Group

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for each year since 1979 *(a)* the profits of British Technology Group and *(b)* the returns to the Exchequer from (i) profits, (ii) sales and (iii) levies.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The profits before tax and the returns to the Exchequer from the National Enterprise Board and the National Research Development Corporation are shown in the tables.

National research development corporation
Profits before tax and amounts paid to Her Majesty's Government

£ millions

	Profit before tax	Dividends	Tax paid
1979	12·92	—	3·55
1980	11·85	2·00	5·25
1981	8·42	—	1·71
1982	10·39	—	4·45
1983	2·33	—	3·98
1984	5·18	—	0·93
1985	7·82	2·00	2·16
1986	7·54	2·00	4·80
1987	3·40	2·89	0·89
1988	6·22	1·00	0·62
1989	7·53	7·92	1·70
1990	9·51	2·61	2·27

Note: The 1989 dividend figure includes a special payment of £6 million made under direction from the Secretary of State.

National Enterprise Board
Profits before Tax and Amounts Paid to HMG

£ millions

	Profit before Tax	Interest and Dividends to HMG	Tax Paid	Net (payments to) Receipts from HMG
1979	(9·76)	30·00	0·83	253·21
1980	1·52	12·13	0·47	[1](10·51)
1981	(59·09)	2·85	2·54	[1](1,263·58)
1982	3·89	0·32	0·08	3·03
1983	0·23	0·17	0·43	32·83
1985	51·97	0·18	0·40	(166·45)
1986	5·18	0·00	0·00	(30·00)
1987	4·64	0·00	0·39	(34·04)
1988	5·68	[2]6·50	2·82	0·00
1989	0·59	[2]2·00	1·26	0·00
1990	1·23	0·00	0·00	0·00

[1] Excludes £17·4 million written off under sec. 3(i) Industry Act 1981.
[2] These items are dividends paid on the Board's PDC.

Notes:
1. The financial year end for the Board was changed from the 31 December to the 31 March in 1985. The figures for 1985 are therefore for a 15-month period. All other figures are for 12-month periods ending on 31 December until 1983 and on 31 March thereafter.
2. The last column Titled "Net (Payments to) receipts from HMG" are the net movements on Public Divident Capital (PDC) and Loans from the National Loans Fund (NLF). By 31 March 1987 the NEB had repaid all but £4,775·50 of its "PDC" and "NLF" funding.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all shares held by British Technology Group in private companies and *(a)* their original value when acquired and *(b)* their current value.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The value of shares held and loans made by the National Development Corporation in private companies at 31 March 1990 are shown in the table. The National Enterprise Board's one live investment is 100 per cent. of the shares of Oakwood Loan Finance Ltd. which cost £1·5 million and are currently held at that value.

National Research Development Corporation
Value of shares and loans in private companies held at 31 March 1990

£ thousands

	Cost on acquisition			Current book value		
Company	Shares	Loans	Total	Shares	Loans	Total
Agricultural Genetic Eng. Ltd.	3,755	0	3,755	3,755	0	3,755
Polysystems Ltd.	0	656	656	0	0	0
EFI Materials Ltd.	285	0	285	0	0	0
York Ltd.	293	0	293	293	0	293
Deductive Systems Ltd.	124	0	124	0	0	0
Ferranti Creditphone Ltd.	1,341	0	1,341	1,341	0	1,341
COTAG International Ltd.	50	0	50	0	0	0
XTEC Ltd.	140	0	140	0	0	0
Lynx Group Ltd.	4	0	4	4	0	4
International Business Software Ltd.	201	194	395	201	194	395
Laser Monitoring Systems Ltd.	21	0	21	11	0	11
Sindex Speech Technology Ltd.	75	5	80	0	0	0
Prosys Ltd.	500	0	500	500	0	500
World Press Centre (London) Ltd.	125	0	125	125	0	125
Time & Data Systems Ltd.	40	0	40	40	0	40
Defense Technology Enterprises Ltd.	102	224	326	2	0	2
PERCOM Ltd.	100	0	100	100	0	100
Tangram CAE Ltd.	87	0	87	0	0	0
Straflo Ltd.	14	0	14	0	0	0
Thermal Conversion UK Ltd.	378	115	493	0	0	0
Mupor Ltd.	10	0	10	0	0	0
Biomedical Sensors Ltd.	0	225	225	0	125	125
Torotrak Holdings Ltd.	380	2,177	2,557	127	1,049	1,176
University of Warwick	0	50	50	0	50	50
Hovercraft Development Ltd.	153	0	153	153	0	153
Future Group Ltd.	600	0	600	0	0	0

Company	Cost on acquisition			Current book value		
	Shares	Loans	Total	Shares	Loans	Total
FBM Carbon Ltd.	55	0	55	0	0	0
INOTEC Ltd.	26	0	26	0	0	0
	8,859	3,645	12,505	6,651	1,418	8,069

WALES

Corlan Housing Association

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to make a statement on the housing association consultancy and advisory service report into the causes of the collapse of the Corlan housing association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 17 December.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will discuss with the chairman of Tai Cymru the housing association consultancy and advisory service report into the collapse of the Corlan housing association and Tai Cymru's approval under section 9 of the Housing Act 1980 of Corlan's acquisition of land from Helical Bar Ltd. in 1988-89;

(2) if he will discuss with the chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation his role in the financial collapse of the Corlan housing association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have not discussed these matters with the chairmen and I assume that the hon. Gentleman is not seeking to ascribe responsibility for the financial collapse of Corlan to the chairman of the CBDC. The Department will naturally be consulting Housing for Wales and Cardiff Bay development corporation before we make a statement.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether he has issued any new guidelines to Tai Cymru on the method of monitoring land acquisitions and disposals by Welsh housing associations under section 9 of the Housing Act 1980;

(2) what representations he has had from housing associations regarding the system of monitoring by Tai Cymru of land acquisitions and disposals in Wales under section 9 of the Housing Act 1980;

(3) if he has discussed with the chairman of Tai Cymru the reasons for its approval under section 9 of the acquisition of land by Corlan housing association from Helical Bar Ltd., in 1988-89;

(4) what consultations he has had with the chairman of Tai Cymru regarding the court injunction it applied for against the HTV Wales "This Week" programme on the collapse of the Corlan housing association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have had no such discussions. Housing associations do not require the consent of Housing for Wales to acquire land where they do so without the benefit of housing association grant. Section 9 of the Housing Act 1980 refers to a secure tenant's right to mortgage under the right-to-buy provisions. The hon. Gentleman presumably intends to refer to section 9 of the Housing Associations Act 1985: the consent of Housing for Wales is required to any disposition of land by a registered housing association. Taking out a mortgage on land constitutes a disposition.

I understand that the Corlan housing association entered into a contract to buy the land referred to in November 1989. The association was under no legal obligation to seek Housing for Wales's approval of this acquisition and did not do so. At the end of January 1990 the association applied to Housing for Wales for section 9 consent to take out a mortgage on the land it had already purchased.

I have received no representations from housing associations relating to the granting of consents by Housing for Wales for the disposition of land under section 9 of the Housing Associations Act 1985. In May 1990 Housing for Wales substantially revised its internal procedures for handling those applications for section 9 consent that do not form part of an application for housing association grant. No new guidelines have been issued to Housing for Wales in this matter. As to the future, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 17 December.

Housing for Wales was not a party to the injunction to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Lowland Farmers

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to take in order to assist lowland farmers in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I recognise the importance of lowland farmers in the structure of Welsh agriculture. I will continue to seek to ensure that these farmers, along with others, are able to compete effectively and on equal terms with their counterparts elsewhere in the Community.

Beef Sector

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beef cows there are in Wales; what were the corresponding figures for the last five years; and if he will make a statement about future prospects for the beef sector.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Number of beef cows in Wales at June:

Year	Number
1990	203,912
1989	194,266
1988	182,267
1987	178,769
1986	172,931
1985	174,586

Note: Figures are for both main and minor holdings.

The beef market continues to be underpinned by the special intervention arrangements at a cost of some £8 million a week currently; the suckler cow premium has been extended to include small milk producers, and producers in the less-favoured areas will benefit from the increase in the rate for 1991 which is at the maximum level permitted by the EC; and beef producers will also continue

to benefit from the higher rate of beef special premium following the green pound devaluation agreed at last year's price-fixing.

Steel Industry (Job Losses)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs were lost in the steel industry in Wales between 1979 and 1984.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information detailing separately the number of jobs lost or created in the industry are not available. Combined data from the British Steel Corporation and the Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau show that there were 55,000 jobs in the steel industry in Wales at the end of December 1979. In 1984 the figure was 22,000.

THE ARTS

Greater London Arts Association

30. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to meet the interim board of the Greater London Arts Association to discuss the future of the arts in London.

Mr. Renton: I have no plans at present to meet the governing committee of Greater London Arts to discuss the administration of arts funding in London.

Regional Exhibitions

31. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what funds have been earmarked by his office to help regional arts organisations to promote and organise touring exhibitions of paintings and sculpture drawn from permanent collections.

Mr. Renton: Government support for the promotion of organised touring exhibitions is channelled through the travelling exhibitions unit of the Museums and Galleries Commission and the visual arts department of the Arts Council. The MGC travelling exhibitions unit and the Arts Council visual arts departments are expected to spend £210,000 in the current financial year.

Enhancement Fund

32. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what guidelines he gave to the Arts Council for the use of the new enhancement fund.

Mr. Renton: The Government set out the overall objectives of the enhancement fund. These were to strengthen leading arts organisations and enhance further their current high standards, and at the same time to improve business and financial planning and to provide challenge, where appropriate, for matching funds from other sources. I subsequently approved the detailed criteria that the Arts Council proposed to use in deciding upon the allocation of awards to individual organisations.

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what guidelines he gave to the Arts Council for the use of the enhancement fund among clients of the Greater London Arts association.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier to a question from the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). The criteria that the Arts Council applied to clients of Greater London Arts were the same as those that I approved for general application.

Music Hall

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has any plans to encourage financial support out of public funds for music hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I understand that the Arts Council, through which Government funds for the performing arts are channelled, has no specific plans to provide funds for music hall. The Arts Council knows that it has a very small but devoted following and, together with the regional funding bodies, will consider any individual applications for financial support.

National Railway Museum

36. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to visit the national railway museum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I hope to visit the national railway museum in York in the near future. I met the keeper of the national railway museum during an enjoyable and informative visit I made to the science museum in South Kensington on 17 January.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

37. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on progress under the Government's "next steps" agency initiatives.

Mr. Renton: The "next steps" initiative continues to make excellent progress; 34 agencies have now been established, and we expect that number to rise to 50 by this summer. By the end of the year we expect that "next steps" will apply to about half the civil service.

Trade Unions

39. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he next intends to meet the leaders of civil service trade unions to discuss morale.

Mr. Renton: I intend to follow the practice of my predecessors and meet civil service trades union representatives as appropriate.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met the leaders of trade unions representing the civil service to discuss changes to civil service conditions of work and employment.

Mr. Renton: I have not yet met the civil service trade union leaders to discuss civil service issues. I shall, of course, do so as appropriate. I did, however, meet representatives of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists on Monday 21 January for discussions on heritage funding issues and the national museums and galleries.

SCOTLAND

Fishing

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, with port of registration, the Scottish-registered fishing vessels affected by the eight-day tie-up rule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not appropriate to publish what would be regarded as commercially sensitive information about individual fishing vessels. However, the skippers, or agents, of all active Scottish-based licensed fishing vessels have been informed individually by letter issued by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department on 16 January whether or not, on the basis of the Departments' records, their vessel is expected to be affected by the new regime. The table shows the estimated number of vessels affected by the scheme based in each fishery district.

Base District	*Number of Vessels in Scheme*
Aberdeen	15
Arbroath	7
Ayr	2
Buckie	43
Campbeltown	1
Eyemouth	25
Fraserburgh	59
Kinlochbervie	1
Lochinver	3
Lossiemouth	47
Macduff	40
Mallaig	—
Oban	—
Orkney	12
Peterhead	66
Pittenweem	20
Shetland	26
Stornoway	—
Ullapool	—
Wick	16
Total	384

Manufacturing GDP

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the provisional estimate for *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1989 of Scotland's contribution to the United Kingdom manufacturing gross domestic product, excluding continental shelf.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The table shows the estimated gross domestic product for manufacturing industries at factor cost in current prices for Scotland and the United Kingdom for 1988 and 1989. The continental shelf makes no contribution to the gross domestic product of manufacturing industries.

Gross domestic product of manufacturing industries at factor cost: current prices

	Scotland	*United Kingdom*	*Scotland as a percentage of the United Kingdom*
	£ million	*£ million*	*per cent.*
1988	7,245	91,196	7·9
1989[1]	7,781	97,380	8·0

[1] provisional.
Source: Central Statistical Office.

Foxes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will provide a breakdown of moneys allocated to Scottish fox destruction clubs since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	£
1979-80	20,633
1980-81	17,084
1981-82	22,071
1982-83	25,079
1983-84	24,563
1984-85	33,023
1985-86	33,714
1986-87	36,639
1987-88	39,854
1988-89	47,649
1989-90	58,981
1990-91	[1]47,000

[1] estimated.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will give consideration to the research of Dr. Ray Hewson of Aberdeen university on fox control when allocating funds to fox destruction clubs in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the report of Dr. Hewson's research and reactions to it which he has received. He will make his views known once his consideration of the report and of further material promised in it has been completed.

Salmon

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct the Salmon Advisory Committee to make an assessment of criteria for sufficient salmon returning to spawn in Scottish rivers and to draft guidelines for the proper management of net fisheries in rivers and estuaries and publish that information for the guidance of all concerned with the implementation of section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. The review of east coast salmon netting is being undertaken by Fisheries Ministers. Work on the review is being completed. It is hoped to present the report to Parliament, as required by section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986, shortly.

The Salmon Advisory Committee has a full programme of work on other matters.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to reduce the waiting list of those patients awaiting heart bypass surgery in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since central funding began in 1983, the number of heart bypass operations performed in Scotland has increased from 853 to 1,500 by December 1989. Between January and September 1990 1,074 heart bypass operations were carried out—the latest available information. This financial year, the three health boards involved have received £15·7 million for cardiac surgery services—£9·5 million to Greater Glasgow, £4·9 million to Lothian and £1·3 million to Grampian. Aberdeen royal infirmary is being funded to enable it to increase its throughput from an initial level of around 50 patients a year to 300 a year by 1992. This year Greater Glasgow health board has received an additional allocation of £467,000 from the waiting list fund initiative specifically to treat an extra 80 cardiac surgery patients.

On 24 January I announced a further increase in funding for the systematic expansion of the Scottish cardiac surgery programme, as the Government will provide £374,470 more to Lothian health board for this purpose during 1990-91. Having carried out 579 open heart operations in the first nine months of 1990-91, the board is well on its way to meeting its target for the year. This additional funding will further enhance the work at the royal infirmary of Edinburgh and contribute to an even better performance to reduce waiting times for surgery.

The new centre to provide heart transplant surgery to be established in 1991-92 at the royal infirmary, Glasgow, which I announced on 14 January, will be a valuable addition to services already being provided in the field of cardiac surgery. It will have the capacity to carry out not only heart transplants but other cardiac procedures.

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the level of expenditure on the sheltered placement scheme for each of the Scottish regional councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information about local authority expenditure on sheltered placements is not held centrally. However, the Employment Service contributes 75 per cent. of the cost to local authorities of providing sheltered employment. On the basis of claims made by regional and islands councils the Employment Service has estimated its contribution to the cost of providing sheltered placements in 1989-90, the latest year for which data are available. Details set out exclude data in respect of Borders regional council which has yet to submit details of its claim for support in respect of 1989-90.

Regional and island council	*Amount of Employment Service contribution* £
Central	27,000
Dumfries and Galloway	31,000
Fife	325,000
Grampian	150,000
Highland	129,000
Lothian	30,000
Strathclyde	143,000
Tayside	42,000
Orkney	13,000
Shetland	25,000
Western Isles	16,000

Given the grant rate these sums can be taken as representing three quarters of total expenditure on sheltered placements by the authorities concerned. The balance of each authority's expenditure on sheltered employment will be expenditure on sheltered workshops.

Nurses

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, under Project 2000, the students' rostered service contribution is supernumerary or part of the standard services manpower.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Project 2000 students will be supernumerary throughout their three-year training, but will be required to deliver a rostered service contribution which will normally amount to 1,000 hours and take place in the third year of the programme.

Lithotripsy

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals there are for a lithotripsy service in the west of Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish lithotripsy service is operated by Lothian health board at the Deaconess hospital in Edinburgh and treats patients referred from all over Scotland and the north of England. Demand for treatment from within Scotland would not justify the establishment of a second centre at this time.

School Catchment Areas

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to education authorities on parental rights when school catchment areas are subject to rezoning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In terms of the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 1981, education authorities are required to publicise and to consult parents and other interested parties on any proposals to amend a school's delineated area.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list his powers to determine school catchment areas; what advice he has given to education authorities in this respect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has no such powers, nor has he offered advice to education authorities on this matter.

Sandeels

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the existing monitoring programme of sandeels will continue during any proposed closure of the Shetland sandeel fishery and following any subsequent reopening of the fishery.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Continued monitoring of this stock by present methods and at the present level cannot be justified by comparison with other priorities in the maritime laboratory's research programme. If, following consultation, the fishery remains closed and stocks subsequently show signs of recovery, the case for monitoring will be reassessed.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration has been given by his Department to the duration of any proposed closure of the Shetland sandeel fishery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: While a final decision on the management arrangements for the Shetland sandeel fishery in 1991 is subject to consultation with interested parties, a consultation paper issued on 24 December 1990 proposes that the fishery be closed until spawning stock levels recover. It is not possible to predict how long this will take.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to make financial provision to enable those recently engaged in the Shetland sandeel fishery to convert to fishing alternative stocks during the proposed closure of the fishery.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. Those fishing vessels normally involved in the Shetland sandeel fishery already fish for other species.

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North may expect to receive an answer to his letter dated 28 September 1990 concerning sandeel fishing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 January 1991]:* Further to my reply of 23 January, we have now received a copy of the right hon. Member's letter and my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde replied today.

Education Spending

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the financial consequences of his discussions on capital spending limits for education authorities announced in his revenue support statement on 17 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Final decisions on the distribution of the available resources have still to be taken. Authorities will be informed within the next few weeks of their capital consent allocations for 1991-92 and the two subsequent years.

New Primary Schools

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria he applies to authorising the construction of new primary schools in urban areas; what advice he has given to education authorities in this respect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Decisions on the provision of new schools are for the education authorities. They must consider any proposals on their individual merits and my right hon. Friend has issued no guidance to authorities on the criteria they should apply.

Medical Compensation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of money paid by each of the health boards in 1990 in relation to medical compensation cases; and what was the average award.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Given the small number of cases in certain health boards, it is not appropriate on the grounds of confidentiality to publish the information in the form requested. The total amount of compensation payments, including claimants' costs, for all boards in 1990 was £1,364,446 and the average award, including claimants' costs, was £17,953.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list areas of Scotland which he has identified for future designation as environmentally sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A review of the environmentally sensitive area scheme is due to be completed in 1991. Meantime there are no plans to designate further areas in Scotland.

Environmental and Nature Conservation

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the terms of reference of the Scottish working group on education with regard to environmental and nature conservation matters.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have placed a copy in the Library of the House, together with a list of members of the group.

Alcohol and Drug Misuse

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the voluntary organisations which have received help to combat alcohol and drug misuse, in the last financial year, giving in each case the amounts given.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* Full details of the support given by health boards to local voluntary organisations concerned with alcohol and drug misuse are not held centrally. However, over £2 million was set aside in the health programme in 1989-90 specifically for the support of drug misuse services and a substantial proportion of this sum was used to support the work of voluntary organisations.

In addition, support was given to voluntary organisations concerned with alcohol and drug misuse from centrally held funds under section 16B of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978, section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the Local Government Grants (Social Need) Act 1969 (the urban programme). Details of assistance given under these provisions are as folllows:

Organisation	*Amount (1989-90)* £
Scottish Council on Alcohol	142,190
Scottish Drugs Forum	48,800
Drinkwise Orkney	13,360
Church of Scotland (Designated Place, Inverness)	6,750
Glasgow Council on Alcohol	
(1) Barlinnie Addiction Project	10,522
(2) Hostels project	29,124
Ayrshire Council on Alcohol	63,444
Renfrew Council on Alcohol	38,229
Anchor House (Perth)	23,064
Aberdeen Council on Alcohol	50,995
Falkirk Drug and Solvent Abuse Project	16,015
Aberdeen Drugs Action Outreach Project	22,350
West Edinburgh Support Team	25,841
East End Drug Forum (Glasgow)	61,980
Inverclyde Drugline	43,879
St. Enoch's Drug Rehabilitation Programme	82,237
West Lothian Drug Education Project	24,898
Total	703,678

Postal Services

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will take steps to ensure that postal service names and areas and local government names and areas in Scotland are brought into alignment.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

Decisions concerning aspects of the day-to-day running of the Post Office, such as those relating to the designation of postal addresses and postcodes, are operational matters for the Post Office. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to comment on this matter in detail. However, I understand that postal addresses are sorting and routing instructions for the Post Office, allowing mail to reach its destination from any part of the country by the fastest and most economical route. They are not intended, therefore, to describe particular geographical locations, nor to correspond with geographical or political boundaries.

Outmigration

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total net civilian outmigration from Scotland in the 12 months ended June 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 14 January 1991 at column *427*.

ENERGY

Energy Conservation

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has to strengthen his Department's energy conservation programme.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) earlier today.

British Coal Enterprise Ltd.

13. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the number of new job opportunities created by British Coal Enterprise Ltd. since 1984.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that British Coal Enterprise Ltd. has helped create some 68,000 new job opportunities, nationwide, since its inception in 1984.

20. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimated funding has been allocated to British Coal Enterprise Ltd. since 1984.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since 1984 this Government have made available some £60 million to British Coal Enterprise Ltd. to assist it in its job creation activities.

Middle East Oil

14. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what contingency plans exist to safeguard and conserve oil supplies in the light of events in the middle east.

21. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to ensure the continued availability of petroleum products to retail customers in the context of the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Wakeham: There are ample supplies of oil at present. The United Kingdom maintains a range of contingency plans and is playing its full part in the measures announced by the International Energy Agency which are being reviewed by the governing board today.

UKAEA Police

15. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the work of the UKAEA police.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The latest annual report of the chief constable of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority constabulary was published in August 1990. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Miners' Strikes

16. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of output lost through industrial disputes in the coal industry in 1978-79; what was the level lost in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: The level of output lost through industrial disputes in the coal industry in 1978-79 was 1·5 million tonnes, and in 1989-90 was 600,000 tonnes.

Piper Alpha

17. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations have been held between his Department and interested parties following the publication of the report of the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster.

Mr. Moynihan: Intensive discussions are proceeding with other relevant Government Departments about the transfer of responsibility for offshore safety to a new division of the Health and Safety Executive.

My right hon. Friend has met representatives of the AEU and I have met the UK Offshore Operators Association. In addition, the content and implications of Lord Cullen's report have been discussed in a number of more general meetings with various groups in the oil industry.

Gulf War (Ecological Consequences)

18. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his statement earlier this month on the possible environmental consequence of igniting the oilfields of Kuwait, whether any studies have been carried out by his Department on this matter.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has consulted the Meteorological Office and has contributed appropriately to its study.

Electricity Generation

19. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy of how many independent electricity generation projects he has been made aware.

24. **Mr. Ground:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy of how many independent electricity generation projects he has been made aware.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department is aware of around 20 major independent electricity generation projects which have been made public. My Department has also been advised, in confidence, of a number of other proposals, but it will be for the companies concerned to decide when to make public the details.

Coal Imports

22. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the amount of coal imported for electricity generation for the years 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do not make such estimates.

27. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the job implications for British Coal of the level of imports.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss coal imports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Unleaded Petrol

23. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the increase in market share of the sale of unleaded petrol in 1989; and what was the increase in other EC countries.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the increase in market share of the sale of unleaded petrol in 1989; and what were the figures in other EC countries.

Mr. Moynihan: The market share of unleaded petrol increased rapidly in the United Kingdom during 1989—from 4 per cent. in January to 28 per cent. by December, an overall market share of 19 per cent. for that year. The United Kingdom share has subsequently increased to 38 per cent. in December last year.

The United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association estimates that in 1989 the market share of unleaded petrol in other European Community countries was as follows: West Germany 59 per cent., Denmark 57 per cent., Netherlands 37 per cent., Luxembourg 21 per cent., Belgium 19 per cent., Eire 7 per cent., France and Italy 2 per cent., and Spain and Portugal 0·5 per cent.,

Sales of unleaded petrol in Greece were negligible.

Rural Electricity Supply

26. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will meet the Director General of OFFER to discuss the supply of electricity to remote rural areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for the supply companies concerned, within their statutory and licence obligations. The director general is empowered to determine disputes over the terms or conditions of supply.

Gas Inspections

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will bring forward proposals to enable the Director General of OFGAS to ensure that no charges are levied on the consumer for action taken by British Gas officials inspecting domestic premises where there is a suspicion or risk of danger to the safety of the consumer.

Mr. Moynihan: No. British Gas is already obliged under its authorisation to make safe all gas escapes free of charge and to provide safety checks free of charge for older or disabled customers living alone.

British Coal

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he appointed a new chairman of British Coal; what terms of reference he gave him regarding the future of the industry; and what will be his yearly salary.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The new chairman of British Coal, Neil Clarke, was appointed from 1 January 1991. In accordance with the normal arrangements for nationalised industries his objectives are being agreed with him and these will be announced in the near future. Mr. Clarke's salary is £225,000 per annum. The appointment is not pensionable and his remuneration therefore includes an element in lieu of pension.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what licence fees have been paid in respect of the use of "Star Trek" copyright material used in the television advertising campaign for the flotation of the electricity generating companies of England and Wales; and to whom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The licensing arrangements entered into between Collett Dickenson & Pearce and Paramount Pictures are commercially confidential.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy for what part the licence fees for the use of the "Star Trek" copyright in the advertising campaign for the flotation of the generating companies of England and Wales have accounted in the total costs of that advertising campaign.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The licensing arrangements are commercially confidential. It is not Government policy to give advertising budgets in advance of flotations. All expenditure, including marketing, will be reported to Parliament in the usual way.

Sizewell Computer Software

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with, and representations from, the chairman of Nuclear Electric regarding the impact of developments in respect of the Controbloc P20 computer software system for the external financing limit in respect of the Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Difficulties with the Controbloc P20 computer software system have only recently arisen as a result of a review by Electricité de France (EDF). Whilst this is a matter for Nuclear Electric plc, I am advised that NE is currently reviewing the position with a view to ensuring that there is no impact on the overall construction schedule for Sizewell B.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's definition, by category, of renewable energies; and if he will list separately, by category, the ways in which the Government's recent legislation will assist each, financially and through statute.

Mr. Moynihan: Energy Paper 55 published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1988, copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses, lists renewable energy technologies by economic classification. Those electricity generation technologies which are close to commercial application such as landfill gas, waste incineration, wind and hydroelectricity are eligible for contract at an above-market price under the non-fossil fuel obligation. Procedures are in hand to make the second non-fossil fuel obligation renewables order later this year.

HEALTH

Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answer of 21 January concerning response times for emergency ambulance services, if he will state the standards applicable to Greater London *(a)* before and *(b)* after the relaxations there mentioned.

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1974 the response standards applicable to the area covered by the London ambulance service have been:

Percentile	*Minutes*
50	7
95	14

Under the new classification the 50 percentile time is 8 minutes; the 95 percentile time is unchanged.

Blood Donations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage by gender of blood donated over a similar period *(a)* up to the Gulf war and *(b)* since the Gulf war.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when guidance will be issued on the powers and duties of local authorities to charge for personal social services; and which organisations he will be consulting.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Appropriate guidance on the powers and duties of local authorities in relation to charging for personal social services will be issued well before local authorities take over full responsibilities for community care in April 1993. Local authorities will be consulted before such guidance is issued.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any proposals to bring forward legislation to remove the responsibility for personal social services from local government.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to do so.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what body will become responsible for the purchase of health services within the area of each of the district health authorities in England listed in his answer of 21 January becoming a trust on an all-authority basis in April 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In all districts, district health authorities will be the purchasers of hospital and community health services for their residents. Where they exist, GP fund holders will have responsibility for purchasing a prescribed range of medical services for their patients.

Fluoride

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has about reduction in dental decay as a result of the addition of fluoride to drinking water.

Mr. Dorrell: Evidence in this country of the efficacy of fluoridation of drinking water is well documented. For example, two studies in 1987 compared samples of 14-year-old children in fluoridated south Birmingham and non-fluoridated Bolton and samples of five-year-old children in fluoridated Newcastle and non-fluoridated south Northumberland.

In the study of south Birmingham 32 per cent. of children there were shown to be free of caries compared with only 19 per cent. in Bolton. In the study of Newcastle and Northumberland 50 per cent. of the children in the fluoridated area were free of caries compared with only 32 per cent. in the non-fluoridated area. It was also found that in Northumberland 37 per cent. of the children had five or more carious teeth compared with only 16 per cent. in Newcastle.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has available on whether the adding of fluoride to drinking water represents any health risk to the individual.

Mr. Dorrell: There is no evidence to show that increasing the level of fluoride in drinking water to the optimum concentration of one part per million has any adverse effect upon health. This has been confirmed repeatedly by groups of scientific experts. Major reviews of the extensive scientific literature have been undertaken by the World Health Organisation, the Canadian Public Health Association, the US National Academy of Sciences, the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council.

The safety of fluoridation of water supplies has been reviewed by the Royal College of Physicians, the DHSS working party on fluoridation of water and cancer and the Government's independent expert medical and scientific advisory committees on mutagenicity and carcinogenicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment.

Abortion

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has issued any instructions about the provision of abortion in those districts which have reduced their abortion services;

(2) what plans he has for reducing geographical inequalities in the provision of abortion services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The level of gynaecological provision including abortion, like any other provision within the national health service, is decided by individual health authorities. The Government believe that such decisions are best taken locally in the light of authorities' first-hand knowledge of local needs and priorities and competing claims on resources.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the ratio of NHS to non-NHS abortions in each regional health area by place of usual residence for each year since 1985.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions were paid for by the NHS under agency arrangements in 1988, 1989 and 1990, by place of usual residence; *(a)* in each regional health authority and *(b)* in each district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on terminations performed in individual district health authorities cannot be released on grounds of confidentiality. Data for terminations in regional health authorities are shown in the table. The latest full data year available is 1989.

Number of terminations to residents of England and Wales carried out in each regional health authority (RHA) under agency arrangements by RHA of usual residents, 1988, 1989

RHA of termination	Year	England and Wales	Wales	RHA of usual residence Northern	Yorks.	Trent	East Anglian	North West Thames	North East Thames
England and Wales	1988	9,357	5	2	445	795	3	1,036	27
	1989	9,200	4	3	438	88	3	1,240	29
Wales	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire	1988	420	0	0	420	0	0	0	0
	1989	435	0	0	434	1	0	0	0
Trent	1988	723	0	2	23	698	0	0	0
	1989	8	0	3	3	2	0	0	0
East Anglian	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West Thames	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Thames	1988	9	0	0	0	0	0	7	1
	1989	7	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
South East Thames	1988	371	0	0	0	1	0	5	2
	1989	438	0	0	0	0	0	3	7
South West Thames	1988	1,318	0	0	0	0	0	1,012	24
	1989	1,504	0	0	0	0	2	1,226	21
Wessex	1988	751	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	704	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oxford	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Western	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	1988	5,762	4	0	0	96	3	12	0
	1989	6,100	3	0	1	85	1	8	0
Mersey	1988	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Western	1988	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
	1989	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

RHA of termination	Year	South East Thames	South West Thames	Wessex	Oxford	South Western	West Midlands	Mersey	North Western
England and Wales	1988	591	24	682	354	95	5,296	1	1
	1989	613	42	646	390	81	5,618	3	2
Wales	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trent	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Anglian	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West Thames	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Thames	1988	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	1989	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
South East Thames	1988	329	2	9	1	2	20	0	0
	1989	380	15	15	1	2	15	0	0
South West Thames	1988	262	16	0	4	0	0	0	0
	1989	232	17	0	5	0	1	0	0
Wessex	1988	0	6	672	4	66	1	1	0
	1989	0	9	629	2	62	1	0	0
Oxford	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

RHA of termination	Year	South East Thames	South West Thames	Wessex	Oxford	South Western	West Midlands	Mersey	North Western
South Western	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	1988	0	0	1	344	27	5,275	0	0
	1989	0	0	1	382	17	5,601	1	0
Mersey	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
North Western	1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of abortions for resident women of England and Wales carried out *(a)* in NHS premises, *(b)* by agency arrangements and *(c)* in the private sector in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The data are shown in the table. The latest full data year available is 1989.

Number of terminations by category of premises (a) NHS (b) private sector[1] (c) agency, England and Wales 1985-89 England and Wales residents

Year	NHS	Private sector	Agency
1985	65,176	69,996	5,929
1986	67,451	73,349	6,819
1987	69,442	78,708	8,041
1988	69,103	89,838	9,357
1989	70,722	90,541	9,200

[1] All non-NHS minus those performed under Agency arrangements.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions or advice his Department has issued to health authorities in the past 10 years on the provision of NHS abortion services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department discussed the findings of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' report on late abortions in England and Wales in 1985 with regional general managers and regional medical officers and health authorities were encouraged to improve their administrative referral systems. The chief medical officer and chief nursing officer issue circulars and letters to all doctors and nursing officers about aspects of abortion treatment and care when appropriate.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of the cost of an NHS abortion accounted for by the legal requirement for two doctors to assess and certify a patient's eligibility under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested, but the estimated revenue cost of an abortion in NHS hospitals is £200.

Part III Accommodation

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* by social services authority and *(b)* for each of the last three years, the number of people on waiting lists for part III accommodation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for each local authority to determine in individual cases if residence in part III home is appropriate. Information about the number of people who approach local authorities seeking this type of care is not available centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* by social services authority and *(b)* for each of the last three years (i) the average age of people in part III accommodation and (ii) the average age of people on admission to part III accommodation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information could be only partially obtained and then only at disproportionate cost.

Leicestershire Health Authority

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on funding, through the Trent region, for the Leicestershire health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government announced on 16 January an increased initial allocation to Trent regional health authority for 1991-92 of 10·5 per cent. The regional health authority expects to be able to inform Leicestershire district health authority of its initial allocation for 1991-92 in a few weeks.

NHS Doctors

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of doctors employed by the national health service in each year since 1974.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is given in the following table.

National health service doctors in England

Year	All staff*
1974	49,107
1975	55,629
1976	57,167
1977	58,502
1978	60,001
1979	61,554
1980	63,130
1981	64,612
1982	65,991
1983	66,910
1984	67,282
1985	68,194
1986	68,839
1987	69,532
1988	70,995
1989	72,446

Notes to the table:
Figures relate to hospital and community health service medical staff

holding permanent paid and honorary appointments as at 30 September each year and general medical practitioners as at 1 October each year.

Prior to 1975 comparable community health service medical staff figures are not available and are therefore not included. With the national health service reorganisation on 1 April 1974 the responsibility of this service was transferred from local authorities and the DES to the national health service.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average charge for dental treatment, in cash and constant prices, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows (in column 2) the average cash charges for dental treatment provided under general dental services in England in each financial year since 1979. The constant prices (in column 3) convert the cash prices to their 1989-90 equivalent.

Average dental charge paid by NHS patients paying the full proportion of the charge

(1) Financial year	*(2) Cash price* £	*(3) Constant price* £
1979-80	6·83	13·69
1980-81	8·88	15·50
1981-82	10·33	15·96
1982-83	12·54	18·09
1983-84	13·62	18·78
1984-85	14·72	19·32
1985-86	16·67	20·75
1986-87	17·56	21·14
1987-88	18·43	20·04
1988-89	19·84	21·10
1989-90	25·02	25·02

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the proportion of dental treatment costs met by charges to patients in each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The proportion of the cost of dental treatment, provided under general dental services in England in each year since 1979, met by charges to patients was as follows:

Calendar year	*Total cost*	*Amount paid by patients*	*Patient charge as a percentage of total cost*
1979	303,684,708	63,393,432	20·87
1980	389,766,235	89,567,462	22·98
1981	454,565,184	110,809,324	24·38
1982	510,473,259	135,713,892	26·59
1983	553,051,518	154,084,986	27·86
1984	604,598,780	167,650,236	27·73
1985	634,860,271	189,747,707	29·89
1986	698,446,424	216,927,756	31·06
1987	772,798,504	233,924,375	30·27
1988	881,697,114	270,184,733	30·64
1989	930,070,732	361,931,301	38·91
1990	984,607,527	382,676,509	38·87

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which section is responsible within his Department for drafting the guidance for the implementation of the community care proposals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The community services division (branch 4) is responsible to Ministers for implementation of our community care proposals. This division prepared the policy guidance which was issued in November 1990, with extensive support from the social services inspectorate, social services and health managers and professionals and other outside experts. Individual items of practice guidance are being prepared by the social services inspectorate, practitioners and academic and consultancy experts. Each is prepared within the overall implementation framework and is approved by Ministers.

Eye Tests

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of sight tests undertaken in each of the last nine quarters.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Statistics on NHS sight tests paid for by the general ophthalmic services are collected on a six-monthly basis. The figures for the latest available two years are as follows:

Great Britain	*Sight tests paid for (millions)*
April 1988—September 1988	6·641
October 1988—March 1989	7·754
April 1989—September 1989[1]	[2]3·828
October 1989—March 1990[1]	2·210
April 1990—September 1990[1]	[3]2·358

[1] After entitlement to NHS tests restricted to priority groups.
[2] Includes 1·8 million tests conducted before April 1989.
[3] Provisional.

Since 1 April 1989 many people who are not entitled to NHS sight tests (about two thirds of the population) have had private sight tests. The Department collects no figures relating to these tests: however, an independent NOP survey commissioned by the Department indicated that the total number of sight tests (private and NHS) during the first quarter of 1990 was at the level that could have been expected if trends up to 1987 had been projected forward.

NHS Spending

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* total NHS spending and *(b)* hospital and community health services' spending as a proportion of real national disposable income in each year since 1987-88.

Mr. Dorrell: The concept of "real national disposable income" is not used in United Kingdom national accounts. The table gives NHS and HCHS expenditure for the years requested as a proportion of United Kingdom gross domestic product.

Total NHS (UK) spending and hospital and community health services' spending as a percentage of personal disposable income

	Total NHS Gross Expenditure	*Total NHS Gross Expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product*	*Total hospital and community health services*[1] *Gross Expenditure*	*Total health and community health services*[1] *Gross Expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product*
	£ million		*£ million*	
1987-88	21,653	5·0	16,383	3·8
1988-89	24,067	5·0	18,145	3·8
1989-90	25,986	5·0	19,646	3·8
1990-91	29,055	5·2	22,073	4·0

[1] New definition of HCHS expenditure which will be used in the forthcoming departmental report. Includes Family Health Services Authority administration, Disablement Services Authority and family health service cash-limited spending.

Health Authorities (Capital Charges)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his initial estimates of the capital charges for each district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. Regional health authorities in England have supplied the following estimates of the capital charges they expect to receive from their directly managed units in 1991-92.

Region	*Expected capital charges receipts (£000)*
Northern	122,306
Yorkshire	131,579
Trent	164,201
East Anglian	85,591
North West Thames	181,837
North East Thames	230,072
South East Thames	185,775
South West Thames	139,009
Wessex	137,538
Oxford	118,274
South Western	100,987
West Midlands	228,143
Mersey	65,738
North Western	184,011

SOCIAL SECURITY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Jack: The Department is committed to supporting the Government's initiative aimed at reducing consumption on the civil estate by 15 per cent. over the next five years. Performance measures have recently been introduced, and additional resources have been allocated to setting targets monitoring them and identifying opportunities for further investment. An allocation of £562,000 has been made for the financial year 1991-92, in addition to sums which will be spent as an integral part of building refurbishment and new construction projects. Particular attention is being given to boiler replacement and improvements to lighting using high-frequency, low-energy fluorescent and ultrasonic controls.

The Department appointed a full-time energy manager in 1987 and has since developed a number of initiatives to improve energy efficiency in the 1,000 buildings which we wholly or partially occupy. The main achievements have been:

—a staff publicity campaign, including a poster competition and features in the staff magazine,
—over £100,000 invested in replacing tungsten lighting with compact fluorescent lighting,
—over £100,000 invested in a variety of small scale initiatives including the installation of heating and lighting controls, false ceilings and high-efficiency fluorescent fittings.

Prior to April 1990, the Property Services Agency was responsible for maintenance of the Department's buildings and undertook the bulk of investment for energy efficiency improvements, for which figures are not available.

Over the four financial years 1986-87 to 1989-90, after adjustment for area, price and weather, energy consumption in the Department increased from £9·10 million to £10·09 million (an increase of 10·88 per cent.), with an increase of £1·12 million (12·49 per cent.) in 1989-90 over 1988-89. Within these figures consumption of boiler fuels declined by 12 per cent. over the four-year period. There was, however, a substantial increase in electricity consumption as a consequence of the introduction of the Department's operational strategy computerisation programme.

Although the Department of Energy has primary responsibility for providing advice and grants on energy efficiency, our Department is supporting the promotion of the home energy efficiency scheme launched on 1 January this year. The scheme is funded by the Department of Energy but administered by the neighbourhood energy action voluntary group. Posters and leaflets are to be made available in social security offices, and the Department's officers providing information and advice services will be made aware of this scheme.

Social Fund

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has issued to local offices in connection with the criteria for making community care grants for clothing to former prisoners other than those with illness or handicap; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Advice on making community care grants is issued to local offices in the form of guidance contained in the "Social Fund Manual", a copy of which is in the Library. It is for the social fund officer to decide on the merits of each individual application.

Child Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing *(a)* what percentage of public expenditure on child benefit goes to families with equivalent income below the mean and *(b)*

what percentage of families receiving child benefit have equivalent incomes below the mean, after housing costs in both cases.

Mr. Jack: The proportion of families receiving child benefit with household incomes below the mean of equivalised income after housing costs has changed little since 1979 and remains in the region of 70 per cent. About 74 per cent. of total Government expenditure on child benefit went to these families.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider making applications for child benefit more widely available through post offices, citizens advice bureaux and other public places.

Mr. Jack: There are three different claim forms for child benefit; one for a first child, another for newly born subsequent children and a third for other children who join the family. These forms are available from any social security office on request by post, telephone or personal call. In addition, leaflet FB8 "Babies and benefits", which is widely available to expectant and nursing mothers, contains a coupon which can be used to obtain the appropriate form. These arrangements, which are kept under review, are intended to ensure that claimants receive the correct form.

Income Support

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of his Department's offices in the Doncaster area *(a)* how many people in receipt of income support are having deductions made at source for community charge arrears and *(b)* how many people are having deductions made from income support for social fund loan repayments; and what is the number of people common to both *(a)* and *(b)*.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information is as follows:

Deductions from income support

	Social fund recoveries	*Community charge*
Doncaster East	1,264	0
Doncaster West	1,478	0
Wath on Dearne	1,155	0

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the population in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom, is dependent upon income support.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage of the population dependent upon income support

	Per cent.
In Scotland	15·7
In Great Britain[1]	12·6

[1] Information for the United Kingdom is not available.

Sources:
Income Support figures: Annual Statistical Enquiry May 1989.
GB population figures: OPCS
Scotland population figures: General Register Office.(Scotland).

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are made for the payment of income support to individuals employed by companies which close down for holiday periods who receive no pay during such periods.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support is available to people who are on unpaid holiday only if they normally work, on average, fewer than 24 hours a week. Anyone on compulsory unpaid holiday, including a person who normally works 24 or more hours a week and does not have enough money to tide him over until his next payday may be able to get a social fund crisis loan, if this is the only means of avoiding serious risk to his health and safety.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals have qualified for community charge rebates in Chelmsford in the current financial year to the latest available date.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available, but at 30 November 1990 around 14,000 individuals were in receipt of community charge benefit in Chelmsford.

Source: Housing and Community Charge Benefit Management Information System November 1990 quarterly count of claims; and the Family Expenditure Survey-based analyses.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is, on the latest available figures, the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* income support and *(b)* unemployment benefit, who are, at the same time, following an approved course under the 21 hours rule.

Miss Widdecombe: The rule enables unemployed claimants in receipt of income support to follow part-time education courses. The information requested is not available.

Social Fund

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the main purposes/items for which crisis loans were awarded from the social fund; and what is the average value of such loans.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to 1988-89 and 1989-90 is available in the Secretary of State's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library. Information relating to 1990-91 to 31 December is shown in the table.

	Awards	*Average amount* £
Furniture and household items	32,694	214
Rent in advance	7,507	114
Living expenses (general)	157,950	35
Living expenses (alignment)	154,973	34
Clothing/footwear	5,907	91
Others	13,256	64
TOTAL	372,287	55

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of income support claimants are having deductions made for the repayment of social fund loans in each of his Department's offices on Merseyside.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

Local Office	*Percentage*
Belle Vale	14·9
Bootle	14·5
Breckfield	14·3
City	21·5
Crosby	12·7
Edgehill	15·0
Garston	13·7
Huyton	19·0
Kirkby	15·8
Norris Green	16·7
Toxteth	15·7
West Derby	16·1

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the main purposes items for which budgeting loans were awarded from the social fund; and what is the average value of such loans.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to 1988-89 and 1989-90 is available in the Secretary of State's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library. Information relating to 1990-91 (to 31 December) is shown in the table.

	Awards	*Average value (£)*
Furniture and household items	364,470	231
Washing machine	18,579	208
Bedding	14,667	137
Clothing Footwear	37,901	138
Others	24,013	177
Total	459,630	217

Community Care Grants

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of community care grants are paid to each of high, medium and low priority groups; and for what purposes the community care grants were paid in percentage terms for each category.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available for the number of grants paid as high, medium or low priorities.

The table shows the number and percentage of grants paid for the main types of purpose for April to December 1990. Information relating to 1988-89 and 1989-90 is contained in the Secretary of State's annual reports, which are in the Library.

	Awards	*Percentage of total community care grants*
Furniture and Household Items	102,316	56
Washing Machines	8,329	5
Home Improvements Repair Maintenance	3,085	2
Removal Expenses	6,533	4
Travelling Expenses	29,714	16
Clothing Footwear	22,309	12
Others	10,951	6
Total	183,237	100

Note: Percentages do not sum due to rounding.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will conduct a review of criteria used to allocate cold weather payments to consider additional factors including storm conditions and wind chill.

Mr. Scott: In consultation with the Meteorological Office, we have recently reviewed the working of the cold weather payments scheme and are satisfied that the most important factor in measuring cold weather is air temperature. It would be extremely difficult to incorporate additional factors such as storm conditions and wind chill into a scheme which is intended to be simple to operate and easy to understand.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will revise the requirements that temperatures remain below freezing for seven consecutive days in order to qualify for a cold weather payment.

Mr. Scott: No. The scheme gives extra help towards higher heating costs resulting from a sustained period of cold weather. A period of seven consecutive days where the average daily temperature is 0 deg. C (freezing point) or below is a reasonable indication of this.

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits will be available to service men injured during the Gulf war; and for war widows and their dependants.

Miss Widdecombe: Service men who are injured as a result of the hostilities in the Gulf, and the widows and dependants of those who die as a result of service, will be eligible for pensions and allowances in accordance with the normal provisions of the armed forces pension schemes, administered by the Ministry of Defence and the war pensions scheme, administered by this Department. They may also be eligible for social security benefits.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is yet in a position to announce how housing benefit transitional payments will be treated in April.

Miss Widdecombe: We have made it clear from the beginning that housing benefit transitional payments will be reduced as increases in other benefits make them less necessary. We have decided on a flat rate reduction of £3 in these payments from April. The vast majority of recipients will still gain overall in cash terms from the uprating as other social security benefits are being increased by amounts significantly larger than in April 1990.

Single Parents

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total benefit entitlement of an unemployed single parent with two children aged under five years.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 14 January 1991]:* On the assumption that the qualifying conditions for each benefit are met and the entitlement to each is taken up, the benefit of an unemployed lone parent with two children aged under five years would be made up of child benefit, one-parent benefit and income support. The income support would be calculated as follows:

Applicable amounts	£
Adult personal allowance	36·70
Child's personal allowance	12·35
Child's personal allowance	12·35
Family premium	7·35
Lone parent premium	4·10
	72·85
Less income	
Child Benefit (2 × £7·25)	14·50
One Parent Benefit	5·60
Income Support payable	52·75

The lone parent would also be entitled to housing benefit to meet any eligible rent and community charge benefit to cover 80 per cent. of the community charge. Those who are owner-occupiers may receive help with mortgage interest payments through income support.

The children would also be eligible for free welfare foods assumed to be worth £2·10 per child per week.

Families on income support also get extra help by virtue of their automatic entitlement (passport) to free prescriptions, exemption from dental and optical charges and help with patients' fares to hospital.

Income Maintenance Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provisions exist for employees to receive income maintenance benefits during a period of compulsory unpaid holidays at their place of work; and how many people are affected by them.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 January 1991]:* People who normally work fewer than 24 hours a week can claim income support, or an increase in income support if it is already in payment, during a period of compulsory unpaid holiday. For those people who are normally working 24 hours or more a week and have a dependent child, family credit is available. Family credit is awarded for 26 weeks and remains in payment if an unpaid holiday falls within the period of the award. Information about the number of people affected is not available.

War Widows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what will be the percentage increase in April in the combined value of children's allowance and child benefit payable to a war widow for the first child and each subsequent child in the family;

(2) whether war widows will benefit from the £1 increase in child benefit in April;

(3) what was the combined value of children's allowance and child benefit for the child of a war widow at current and April 1990 prices and as a percentage of average earnings, in November 1979 and as a percentage of average earnings, in November 1979 and at each subsequent uprating date; and what was the reason for any fall in real value since November 1979; and

(4) what method is used to calculate the annual uprating of war widows' children's allowance, and whether it has changed since 1979.

Mr. Jack: The present method of operating war widows' children's allowance follows that established by the last Labour Government. This method entails increasing the basic war widows' children's allowance by the increase in the retail prices index, deducting any cash increase in child benefit and adding an amount of £1·86 which was added as a transitional measure in 1977 by way of compensation to war widows for the loss of their tax allowance during the phasing in of child benefit.

War widows will receive the proposed £1 increase in child benefit in April. Like other child dependency increases payable under the Social Security Act 1975, the method of uprating war widows' children's allowance entails deducting any cash increase in child benefit. Thus, from April, these allowances will be increased to £13·65 for the first qualifying child and to £14·65 for others, representing an overall cash increase of £1·25 for each child. The percentage overall increase in April for both the first and each subsequent child will be 6·05 per cent.

Children's allowances are only one element of support for war widows and their families. Since 1979 several important improvements have been made to the overall position of war widows. In 1979 war widows' pensions were made tax free; in 1984 a new tier of age allowance was introduced for those over 80; in 1988 the disregard on war pensions for income-related benefits was increased to £5 and to £10 in 1990. In 1990 pre-1973 war widows were awarded special payments of £40 a week. These, too, were tax free and are also totally disregarded for the purpose of calculating entitlement to income-related benefits. Both war widows' children's allowances and war widows' pensions have consistently been set at preferential rates compared to those applicable to national insurance widows and children.

Since 1983 pensions and social security benefits have been uprated annually in line with the retail price index.

The table shows values of children's allowance and child benefit for the child of a war widow at current and April 1990 prices and as a percentage of average earnings.

Uprating date[1]	*Value of child benefit plus children's allowance* £	*Average real value at April 1990 prices over the period*[2,3] £	*Real value at April 1990 prices at date of uprating*[2] £	*Value as percentage of average gross weekly earnings*[4] *Per cent.*
November 1979	14·00	26·88	29·07	12·3
November 1980	15·35	26·20	27·64	11·4
November 1981	16·10	25·05	25·89	10·8
November 1982	17·10	25·40	25·88	10·6
November 1983	17·45	24·68	25·19	10·1

Uprating date[1]	Value of child benefit plus children's allowance £	Average real value at April 1990 prices over the period[2,3] £	Real value at April 1990 prices at date of uprating[2] £	Value as percentage of average gross weekly earnings[4] Per cent.
November 1984	17·90	23·90	24·62	9·6
November 1985	18·55	23·96	24·19	9·2
July 1986	18·65	23·54	23·93	8·8
April 1987	18·85	22·96	23·16	8·4
April 1988	19·25	22·13	22·76	7·8
April 1989	19·85	21·16	21·73	7·4
April 1990	20·65	—	20·65	7·0

[1] Uprating dates refer to the children's allowance. For all but the first date they are also the uprating dates for child benefit.
[2] Using general index of retail prices.
[3] Average real values at April 1990 prices are calculated over the period between uprating dates (eg November 1979-October 1980).
[4] The source of the earnings is the New Earnings Survey and the estimates used up to November 1982 are those for full-time working adults aged 21 and over whose earnings are unaffected by absence. From November 1983 the source remains the New Earnings Survey but is in respect of all full-time workers on adult rates whose earnings are unaffected by absence.

War Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to reduce and end the war pensions welfare service and the homecraft service.

Miss Widdecombe: There is absolutely no question of withdrawing the war pensioners' welfare service and we shall certainly not agree to anything that would damage the interests of war widows and war pensioners. The report of a routine management review of the war pensioners welfare service last year suggested no changes in the number of chief welfare officers and welfare officers, but recommended some reductions in the number of support staff and the withdrawal of the homecraft service. No decisions have been taken on these recommendations. The central advisory committee on war pensioners is being consulted about them and has agreed that a joint working party on which war pensioners' interests will be represented, should be set up to review the aims and future of the homecraft service. There will be further consultation with the central advisory committee about the welfare service later this year.

DEFENCE

Electoral Registration

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that service men are given equal voting opportunities with the rest of the electorate.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The electoral registration arrangements for service personnel allow those in the United Kingdom to vote in person, by post or by proxy at parliamentary and local government elections. Service personnel based overseas, like other British citizens living overseas, may vote only by proxy at parliamentary elections. All new recruits are advised of the service electoral registration arrangements and service personnel are regularly reminded of their existence to encourage them to register so that they can exercise their right to vote.

Gas Masks

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which company was awarded the contract to provide gas masks for British troops in Iraq.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. Masks have been provided from stock for troops in the Gulf.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the filter on the gas masks issued to British troops contains any asbestos.

Mr. Alan Clark: The filter on the respirator used by British service men does not contain any asbestos.

Gulf War (Reporting)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines were issued to BBC Radio in England and Wales for reporting of matters concerning the conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Two types of guidelines have been produced. The MOD "Media Ground Rules" have been issued to British journalists in the Gulf, and "Guidance on the Release of Information" has been issued to media editors in the United Kingdom. Copies of both these documents were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 9 January.

Irradiated Food

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *546*, what estimates he has about the costs of irradiated food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is estimated that irradiation of food would increase the cost of processed food by between 5p and 15p per kilogram, dependent on the type of food to be processed. Given the competitive tendering methods the MOD applies to the procurement of food, it is unlikely that MOD would purchase irradiated food, as it would generally be more expensive than food processed by conventional means.

Gulf War

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those units on standby for the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has already announced the deployment of the first battalion, Coldstream Guards to the Gulf to undertake prisoner handling duties. They will be assisted in their duties by two additional battalions, from the Royal Highland Fusiliers and the Kings Own Scottish Borderers, who will deploy shortly. We are also deploying a half squadron of Buccaneer aircraft from RAF Lossiemouth to enhance

allied precision bombing capability. Any additional deployments of forces to the Gulf will be announced as appropriate when they arise.

Military Hospitals

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the nursing establishment of each of the military hospitals in the United Kingdom; and how many vacancies there are in the establishment, at what grades;

(2) what is the total number of nurses employed in military hospitals in the United Kingdom and at what grades.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and locations of all military hospitals in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are eight service hospitals in the United Kingdom which are located at:

Name	*Location*
Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar	Gosport, Hants
Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse	Plymouth
Cambridge Military Hospital	Aldershot, Hants.
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital	Woolwich, London
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital	Catterick, Yorks.
The Princes of Wales (RAF) Hospital, Ely	Ely, Cambridgeshire
The Princess Mary's RAF Hospital, RAF Halton	Halton, Bucks.
Princess Alexandra Hospital, RAF Wroughton	Wroughton, Wilts.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many agency nurses have been employed in military hospitals in the last five years for which information is available; and what were the costs of doing so.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 January 1991

TRANSPORT

A1

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what timescale is envisaged for the widening of the A1 between the north end of the motorway at Birtley and the south end of the Newcastle western bypass; and what areas of land and property will be affected.

Mr. Chope: The next key stage in the Department's preparation of the A1 Gateshead western bypass improvement is a public consultation which is currently planned to take place in 1992.

The area of land and property affected is not yet known.

East London Crossing

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to make a statement on the east London river crossing bridge.

Mr. Chope: The public inquiries into the design of the proposed bridge closed on 8 January. We are now awaiting the inspector's report. A decision will be announced as soon as the report has been received and considered.

Hazardous Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of accidents involving the rail transportation of hazardous and inflammable materials that have taken place within a 50 mile radius of Doncaster, for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Chope: I regret that this information is not available in the form requested.

Parking Schemes

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice his Department gives to local authorities about resident only parking schemes.

Mr. Chope: The most recent published guidance is in Department of Transport circular 6/86 and in the publication "Roads and Traffic in Urban Areas" of which the Department and the Institution of Highways and Transportation are joint sponsors. The former deals with specific changes made by the Road Traffic Regulation (Parking) Act 1986; the latter gives more general guidance on the sort of schemes which may be appropriate and the factors to be taken into account in deciding on them.

Trains

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains operating or which it is planned to operate, in Scotland, were built *(a)* before 1950, *(b)* before 1956, *(c)* before 1960 and *(d)* before 1965.

Mr. McLoughlin: Neither the Department of Transport nor Her Majesty's railway inspectorate holds comprehensive information on construction dates for railway rolling stock.

Merchant Navy Reserve

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current strength of the Merchant Navy Reserve; and how many of its members are now on service in the Gulf.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Merchant Navy Reserve is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, and I have been asked to reply.

The current strength of the Reserve is 301. None of its members have been called out for service in the Gulf, but it is understood that one of them happens to be serving on a ship in the area.

Airports

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with airport authorities generally, and Manchester in particular, in the light of events in the Gulf.

Mr. McLoughlin: Ever since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the Department has kept in close touch with the industry, including airport representatives, about the development of contingency plans to enhance aviation security as appropriate in the light of events. The measures provided for in those plans in the event of hostilities breaking out were brought into effect on 17 Janaury at Manchester as at other United Kingdom airports.

Consultations have also take place with representatives of various airports, including Manchester, about their handling Government charter flights connected with the emergency.

Blackwater Valley Relief Road

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to provide the necessary funding for the completion of the Blackwater Valley relief road southern and central sections.

Mr. Chope: The Blackwater Valley route is being supported with transport supplementary grant and-or credit approvals as appropriate. That support will be maintained through to completion subject to satisfactory progress and the continued availability of funds. The allocation of supplementary credit approvals to Surrey county council in respect of the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92 is being reviewed.

Clapham Train Crash

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to expedite the compensation due from British Rail to the widow of one of the constituents of the right hon. Member for Worthing whose husband was killed in the Clapham train crash; and if he will raise the matter when he next has a discussion with British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Compensation is a matter for British Rail and ultimately the courts. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has no powers to intervene in

individual cases, but will certainly discuss the general progress of claims when he next meets the chairman of British Rail.

Coastguard

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has made any recent review of the role or functions of Her Majesty's coastguard.

Mr. McLoughlin: An internal review of the coastguard sector organisation and Auxiliary service has been carried out by the chief coastguard. The review has considered Her Majesty's coastguard's coastal commitments and has made recommendations covering:

the definition of HM Coastguard's responsibilities;
performance targets;
the sector organisation and the sector officers' role;
the availability and pay of auxiliary Coastguards;
Coastguard vehicles and equipment requirements, training and property management.

Government Departments and any interested bodies are currently being consulted and coastguard regional controllers will now be holding discussions with local interests and staff about the implications of these recommendations in each region. No decisions will be taken on the review's recommendations until the implications have been fully assessed. I am placing a copy of a summary of the review and its recommendations in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Alphachloralose

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any proposals to re-classify alphachloralose; and whether he intends to revoke the approval of phosgen for specific uses.

Mr. Maclean: From 1 March it will be illegal to use alphachloralose as a pesticide unless it is incorporated as an approved product. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides has also recommended that alphachloralose should be moved from part II to part I of the poisons list, thereby making it available only through retail pharmacies.

I am not aware of phosgen, but the approval for sale and supply of phosdrin 24, a pesticide with active ingredient mevinphos, was revoked last September on the advice of the ACP. The storage and use of this product will be prohibited from September 1992.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of individual grant recipients in each environmentally sensitive area; what is the estimated total number of those eligible to receive grant in each environmentally sensitive area; and what is the total amount of grant paid out thus far under the scheme in each environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Curry: The table shows the number of agreements with farmers in each ESA, together with the total sums payable under each scheme at 31 December 1990. Some farmers have a number of agreements. There are no reliable estimates of the number of farmers in each ESA.

ESA	*Number of agreements at 31 December 1990*	*Total amounts payable up to 31 December 1990* £
Breckland	139	1,160,000
Broads	712	5,650,000
North Peak	77	1,890,000
Pennine Dales	290	3,330,000
Shropshire Borders	215	1,520,000
Somerset Levels and Moors	745	2,840,000
Suffolk River Valleys	396	2,300,000
South Downs	183	1,560,000
Test Valley	20	70,000
West Penwith	159	1,260,000
Total	2,936	21,580,000

Crayfish

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when first his Department received advice from the Nature Conservancy Council about the danger to native crayfish stocks from the spread of crayfish plague by the introduction of American signal crayfish; and what action he has since taken in response to this.

Mr. Curry: Officials first received advice from the Nature Conservancy Council in 1977. Crayfish plague was officially confirmed in the United Kingdom in 1983, but it is probable the infection had already been present in our waters since the mid-1970s and that this was linked to the import of American signal crayfish. Such introductions preceded legislation to control, inter alia the import, keeping and release of non-native species of freshwater shellfish. Crayfish plague has now been detected in many of our river systems with crayfish populations. Our scientific advice is that eradication would be very difficult to accomplish. Nonetheless, we are continuing to discuss with the Nature Conservancy Council and the National Rivers Authority the feasibility of means of safeguarding native crayfish stocks in those areas at present free of crayfish plague. The Department is also funding scientific work on diagnostic methods.

Beef Sector

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to help beef calf producers; and if he will make a statement regarding their future prospects.

Mr. Curry: In recognition of problems faced by beef calf producers, the Ministry has, as announced on 28 September 1990, increased suckler cow premium payments in the current year by £8 million, the rate of premium in less favoured areas is now at the maximum rate payable under EC rules and that for lowlands has been maintained at its current level despite an increase in the amount of eligible stock.

"This Common Inheritance"

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking in discussions with the European Commission to honour the Government's commitment in "This Common Inheritance," paragraph 7.20.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister will continue to urge the European Commission and

colleagues in the Agriculture Council to ensure that environmental considerations are fully integrated in agricultural support measures.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 29 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Gulf War

Mr. Latham: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement on the current situation in the Gulf.

The Prime Minister: The allied air campaign is proceeding satisfactorily and continues to erode Iraq's military capability. The effectiveness of the campaign so far is amply demonstrated by the very few and unsuccessful deployments of the Iraqi air forces, but there is still some way to go before our aim of implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions can be achieved. We condemn Iraq's use of missiles in indiscriminate attacks against civilian populations in Israel and Saudi Arabia. We also deplore Iraq's wanton destruction of the environment of the middle east by deliberately pumping oil into the Gulf.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister what co-ordination and consultation arrangements exist between allied Governments to ensure political control of the military forces engaged in the Gulf war.

The Prime Minister: The aims of the coalition forces are those laid down by the United Nations Security Council. Military forces in the coalition remain under the ultimate control of their national governments who are maintaining close contact with each other.

WALES

Higher Education

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Assembly of Welsh County Councils regarding the impact of the loss of top-up powers on the quality and quantity of public sector higher education in Welsh colleges.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We consult the Assembly of Welsh Counties and the Welsh joint education committee every year before deciding on the higher education quantum, the amount of local authority resources we consider is needed for the provision of higher education in the maintained institutions. The figure we proposed for 1991-92 has been agreed by the assembly and the WJEC. We have had no consultations on topping-up, which is a local matter determined by individual LEAs.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Assembly of Welsh County Councils regarding the implications of the Price Waterhouse report on the future of public sector higher education in Welsh colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: All Welsh LEAs have been consulted on the Price Waterhouse report both individually and collectively through the Wales advisory body for local authority higher education. An announcement on the recommendations of the report concerning the future status of the Polytechnic of Wales will be made shortly.

Student Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the amount spent per head per full-time equivalent student in public sector higher education in Welsh colleges in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The recurrent expenditure on higher education provision in Welsh local authority colleges is funded from three main sources. These are the higher education quantum determined annually by the Secretary of State and paid by LEAs from local authority resources, tuition fees paid through the mandatory awards system and "topping-up" payments paid by LEAs to their own colleges. The Department does not hold information on the level of topping-up payments, which are a local matter, but in some cases they are known to be significant. Recurrent expenditure at Trinity college Carmarthen, the only Welsh voluntary college, is funded by grant from the Welsh Office and tuition fees.

The amount of recurrent funding per full-time equivalent home and EC student in public sector higher education in Wales from the higher education quantum, Welsh Office grant and tuition fees is estimated at £3,335 in 1990-91 and £3,738 in 1991-92. These figures take no account of topping-up payments to recurrent expenditure in the local authority colleges and funding for capital expenditure, but cover all public sector higher education in Wales. In this respect they differ from equivalent information regarding the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council sector, which does not take account of local authority higher education provision in England.

Corlan Housing Association

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation regarding the references to the corporation in the HACAS report on the financial collapse of the Corlan housing association;

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of Tai Cymru and the Cardiff Bay development corporation regarding their discussions immediately prior to the financial collapse of the Corlan housing association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 28 January.

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds he has allocated to the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council for the current financial year.

Mr. David Hunt: Funding for TECs is provided by the Secretary of State of Employment. South Glamorgan TEC

has received £60,000 development funding this year and details of its operational budget for the remainder of the year are being finalised.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Expenditure, Harrow

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the per capita expenditure figures for primary and secondary schools in the London borough of Harrow, for the latest date available, of spending per pupil, and the relative figures at constant prices in 1979-80.

Mr. Fallon: Figures for nursery and primary schools are no longer collected separately. Harrow spent £465 per nursery and primary pupil in 1979-80 and £1,115 in 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. It spent £745 per secondary pupil in 1979-80 and £1,740 in 1988-89. At 1988-89 prices those figures are £880 and £1,115 respectively for nursery and primary schools, and £1,405 and £1,740 respectively for secondary schools.

Student Costs (Wales)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the unit costs per student for each of the university colleges in Wales for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the 1990 volume of "University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators," produced by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Universities Funding Council, a copy of which is in the Library. This draws on 1988-89 data: detailed figures for university expenditure in 1989-90 are not yet available.

Student Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his most up-to-date estimate of the amount spent per head per full-time equivalent—FTE—student in public sector higher education colleges in England in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend announced his plans for spending on higher education on 8 November 1990 and published projections for student numbers in higher education on the same date. Recurrent public funding per FTE student in Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council funded institutions underlying the plans is £4,137 in the financial year 1991-92. The latest estimate for such funding in the financial year 1990-91 is £4,018. Total expenditure per student will depend on a number of additional factors on which information is not yet available.

Students

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many A-level entrants were *(a)* school students and *(b)* further education college students on the latest available figures.

Mr. Eggar: For the academic year 1988-89, the total number of A-level examination entries, including AS examinations, taking two AS entries as equivalent to one A-level entry, was as shown.

	A-level examination entries (000s)
School leavers	424·42
Students in further education establishments	76·67

Schools (Salaries)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what principle a grant-maintained school will be funded where its relevant local education authority has opted out of the national determination of wages and conditions and established a salary rate higher than the national rate.

Mr. Eggar: It is not intended that the principles governing the calculation of annual maintenance grant for a grant-maintained school would change because its former maintaining local education authority had opted out in this way.

Training Credits

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has made any assessment of the impact of the introduction of training credits for 16-year-olds upon the staying-on rate in full-time education.

Mr. Eggar: No assessment of the impact is possible in advance of the implementation of the pilot training credit schemes. The impact of the pilot schemes, including the impact on the staying-on rate in full-time education, will be the subject of careful monitoring by my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Education and Science.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the grant-maintained schools that have agreed to recognise trade unions for the purpose of representing teachers on disciplinary and individual grievance matters.

Mr. Eggar: It is for the governing body of a grant-maintained school, as the employer, to decide whether it wishes to recognise teacher unions for the purpose of representing teachers on disciplinary and individual grievance matters. The Department does not collect information on this matter.

Physical Education

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the national curriculum working party report on physical education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the interim report from the national curriculum working group on physical education. He expects to publish it shortly.

Teaching (Political Bias)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has as to undue political bias and undue emphasis on values and opinions in the teaching of geography; and if he will place such evidence in the Library.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In publishing the draft order for geography in the national curriculum, I made clear my reasons for departing from the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council. I recognise that geography lessons will sometimes deal with conflicting points of view on important geographical issues. The programmes of study which I published with the draft order refer to such issues. However, in setting out statutory statements of attainment against which pupils will be assessed, I believe that the emphasis should be on the knowledge and understanding of geography which inform people's views.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has available of political and other bias in the teaching of *(a)* 20th century history and *(b)* current affairs; and if he will place such evidence in the Library.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Of the complaints of bias that I receive from parents, the major part relate to teaching or classroom discussion about current issues and recent events. That is to be expected, because such issues and events arouse the strongest feelings. I believe that the great majority of teachers handle such matters with sensitivity and care and with full regard to their legal duty to ensure a balanced presentation of opposing views on political issues. Nevertheless, there is a special difficulty in achieving balance when dealing with contemporary events and personalities.

Special Educational Need

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils with statements of special educational need are recorded by each local education authority on DES form SEN(2) for January 1990 as attending maintained special schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools under arrangements made by the authority.

Mr. Fallon: This information was not collected for January 1990 on form SEN2. The Department has since revised form SEN2 in order that such information may be collected for January 1991 in respect of pupils for whom a statement was newly made in the previous year. I have arranged for the hon. Member to receive details in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Liverpool Magistrates Court

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when work will begin on the rebuilding of Liverpool magistrates court.

Mr. John Patten: Subject to the satisfactory completion by the local authority of the various next steps in the planning process, it should be possible for building work on a new Liverpool magistrates court to begin in 1995-96.

Deportation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-Iraqi Arabic or Palestinians resident in Britain have been served with decisions to make a deportation order for national security reasons, on the grounds of being not conducive to the public good; from what areas of the United Kingdom they originated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Twelve non-Iraqi nationals have been advised of my right hon. Friend's decision to deport them on the grounds that their presence is not conducive to the public good for reasons of national security. The majority have lived in the south-east of the country. In one case, my right hon. Friend has decided to take no further action.

Vehicle Clamping

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motor vehicles have been clamped in the Metropolitan police area in each of the past three years; and how many have been clamped for exceeding the time paid for in an authorised parking bay.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the numbers of vehicles clamped in the Metropolitan police area in the years 1987 to 1989 were respectively: 111,117 in 1987; 125,824 in 1988 and 149,663 in 1989. A figure for 1990 is not yet available. No information is available on the number clamped for exceeding the time paid for in an authorised parking bay.

Iraqi Residents

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many residents of the United Kingdom, of Iraqi origin, have been arrested or detained in the last fortnight for national security reasons, on the grounds of being not conducive to the public good; from what areas of the United Kingdom they originated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 101 Iraqis have been detained since the beginning of the year. They came from all parts of the United Kingdom. Forty-two remain in detention under the Immigration Act and 35 military personnel are in military custody. Two are in the United Kingdom having been released from detention and 21 have left or have been deported. In one case my right hon. Friend decided to take no further action and the man has been released from detention.

Police Searches

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Leicestershire on the number of searches of *(a)* private homes and *(b)* businesses that have taken place in Leicestershire over the past five years; and how many of these searches were undertaken without a warrant having been obtained.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is no requirement under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 for police forces to produce statistics of searches of premises. The hon. Member should contact the chief constable of Leicestershire for the information available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of searches of *(a)* private homes and *(b)* businesses that have taken place in England and Wales over the past five years; and how many of those searches were undertaken without a warrant having been obtained.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not collected centrally.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what right of appeal residents have when arrested or detained or notified of deportation orders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Immigration Act, there is no right of appeal to the appellate authorities against my right hon. Friend's intention to make a deportation order for reasons of national security. There is, however, a provision of the immigration rules to permit someone to appear before a panel of three independent advisers, chaired by a Lord Justice of Appeal, who will consider any representations made by the individual and, separately, the security case against the individual. All those made subject to this deportation action are advised of this right and many have chosen to exercise it.

Vagrants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to bring forward proposals to update the Justices of the Peace Act 1361 and in particular the section dealing with branding of vagrants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have no such plans. Neither branding nor vagrants are mentioned in the Justices of the Peace Act 1361.

Ecclesiastic Courts Jurisdiction Act

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to bring forward proposals to up-date the Ecclesiastic Courts Jurisdiction Act 1860; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no plans to amend this Act.

Motor Vehicles (Security)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to persuade the motor vehicle manufacturers to improve the security devices on their vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary and I have discussed this issue with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and are considering a report from the society on the action taken by motor manufacturers to improve the security of their cars. The motor manufacturers have clearly taken some steps to improve the security of their cars, but much more remains to be done. The best way for further progress to be made is for car buyers to give as much attention to the security of their car as they do to its performance and looks.

We give advice to car buyers on what to look for in our crime prevention publicity material and intend to publish a car theft index.

In addition, we will continue to support efforts to seek agreement in Europe to the adoption of the British standard on door-locks as an EC directive.

Prison Service

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future location of the headquarters of the prison service.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In January 1990 my predecessor announced that the headquarters of the prison service would be relocated to the midlands. Following a detailed evaluation of a number of options I have now authorised the opening of negotiations with developers for the construction of a new headquarters building for the prison service at St. Mary's wharf, Derby.

If these negotiations are successful work on site could start later this year with the building being ready for occupation in late 1993 or early 1994. Some posts may move to temporary accommodation in Derby in advance of the general move.

Final details have yet to be settled, but I estimate that around 1,900 posts will eventually be relocated to Derby, 1,500 of these from central London. At least 800 of the 1,900 posts will be filled by local recruitment.

Everthorpe Remand Centre

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish rules establishing the return on capital and turnover which the prison department will be expected to make when submitting a tender for the management of Everthorpe remand centre.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* If the prison service decides to tender for the contract for the management of Everthorpe remand centre we would not propose publishing the make-up of the tender, since this could prejudice or distort the competition for the contract.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those areas in Britain that currently benefit from *(a)* RESIDER, *(b)* RENAVAL and *(c)* RECHAR; how much money they receive from the European Community in regional aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The qualifying areas for RESIDER and RENEVAL are as follows:

RESIDER: The county of South Yorkshire and Scunthorpe travel-to-work area;

RENAVAL: Plymouth travel-to-work area, the county of Tyne and Wear, and Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh districts of Cleveland, Wirral and Sefton districts of Merseyside, Kirkcaldy travel-to-work area and parts of Dunfermline and Alloa travel-to-work areas in Fife region, and Glasgow and Greenock travel-to-work areas in Strathclyde.

The qualifying areas for RECHAR were listed in the Official Journal of the European Communities No. C177 of 18 July 1990.

The RESIDER programme and two of the RENAVAL programmes are already current; they provide for 54 mecu of European regional development fund grant up to the

end of 1993. The RECHAR programmes and the remaining RENAVAL programmes are expected to provide for approximately 130 mecu of ERDF grant over the same period.

Office Furniture

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many United Kingdom companies tendered for his Department's recent contract for office furniture.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has awarded a number of contracts to different companies to supply furniture in recent months.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which company was awarded his Department's recent contract for office furniture.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has awarded a number of contracts to different companies to supply furniture in recent months.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council on 14 December 1990.

Mr. Redwood: The main item for discussion was a communication from the Commission to the Council on the Commission's green paper on satellite communications —"Towards Europe-wide systems and services—Green Paper on a common approach in the field of Satellite communications in the European Community"—which was published on 20 November 1990. The Commission's proposals envisage wide-ranging liberalisation of the use of satellite terminal equipment on a Community-wide basis and equitable and non-discriminatory access to satellite capacity for all telecommunications service providers. The Council held an orientation debate in which the United Kingdom strongly supported the Commission's proposals.

The Council also adopted a resolution on the final phase of the co-ordinated introduction of pan-European public digital mobile cellular communications in the Community—GSM—and a recommendation on the co-ordinated introduction of digital European cordless telecommunications—DECT. A common position was agreed on a proposal for a Council directive on the frequency bands to be reserved for DECT.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Immunity

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of foreign diplomats within the United Kingdom accredited to embassies and consulates, respectively, showing within the total the numbers by status against each foreign embassy and consulate; and how many of the total are entitled to diplomatic immunity.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The total number of diplomatic staff accredited to foreign and commonwealth missions in the United Kingdom are:

	Number
a. Diplomatic agents	2,382
b. Members of Administrative and Technical Staff	2,306
c. Members of Service Staff	393
d. Consular officers accredited to subordinate consulates	391

All members of the staff of diplomatic missions in London who are not United Kingdom nationals nor permanently resident here enjoy a degree of diplomatic immunity under the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964. Those who are diplomatic agents enjoy personal inviolability including freedom from arrest or detention. They are immune from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state, and except in relation to certain private matters, from its civil and administrative jurisdiction. Members of the administrative and technical staff also enjoy personal inviolability and the same immunities except that their immunity from civil and administrative jurisdiction does not extend to acts performed outside the course of their duties. Members of the service staff have immunity only in respect of acts performed in the course of their duties. The immunity of consular officers is governed by the Consular Relations Act 1968.

To list the number of staff at each embassy and consulate by status could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The London Diplomatic List, published biannually, lists diplomatic agents, by mission, accredited to foreign embassies; a copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give, for each of the past five years to the nearest available date, the number of traffic and criminal offences, respectively, by foreign diplomats who were able to claim immunity, with the offences registered by embassy or consulate, and the action that was taken by Her Majesty's Government in the most serious cases.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our policy on diplomatic immunities and privileges is set out in the 1985 White Paper. In the most serious cases we require the withdrawal of the diplomat concerned. The figures requested for the past five years are shown in the table. Details of serious offences and unpaid parking fines are made annually to the House —the last one by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Mr. French) and Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 26 April 1990, at columns *303-5*.

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Traffic offences[1]					
(a) Drink/Driving	24	25	28	27	24
(b) Minor offences	71	86	103	75	52
Serious offences					
Includes (a) above	41	40	44	40	33
Parking					
Unpaid fines	22,331	14,437	10,079	7,831	[2]6,282
Diplomats withdrawn at FCO request	17	18	14	14	6

[1] Technically all traffic offences are "criminal" offences.
[2] Provisional to 31 October 1990—latest figures processed.

Cambodia

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the number of Cambodians still suffering from injuries inflicted under the Khmer Rouge regime; and what steps he has taken and will take to bring Pol Pot and others before the world court under article 9 of the genocide convention.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There is no accurate information available on the number of Cambodians still suffering from injuries inflicted during the Pol Pot regime. Article IX of the genocide convention concerns disputes between states, not the prosecution of individuals. Only states may be parties in cases before the International Court of Justice, which has no criminal jurisdiction.

Ascension Island

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on feral cats on Ascension island.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There is no statistical evidence that feral cats presently represent a major problem on Ascension island, but the matter is under review. If it appears necessary, we shall take steps to reduce the feral cat population.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for a single national scale for the energy efficiency rating of domestic dwellings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 7 December 1990 at columns *243-44*.

Combined Heat and Power

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has in accordance with section 47 of the Electricity Act 1989, on measures taken by the Director General of Electricity Supply in respect of combined heat and power and the extent of its outlined and planned use in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Office of Electricity Regulation, in consultation with the Energy Efficiency Office and representatives of industry, are in the process of compiling a database of CHP projects operating in Great Britain. This should give the Director General of Electricity Supply, Government and industry a good indication of how CHP is progressing.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Sudan

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the Government of Sudan to allow the newly-formed Sudanese Council of Churches to operate famine relief in southern Sudan.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made representations to the Government of Sudan, through the United Kingdom's chairmanship of the donor group in Khartoum, to allow non-government organisations to operate relief activities throughout Sudan to alleviate the present food crisis. We have not taken separate action regarding individual organisations.

Jablonna Conference

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial contribution from public funds was made, and what other support from his Department was given, in respect of the conference at Jablonna, Poland, arranged through the Jagiellonian Foundation in October 1990; and who attended.

Mrs. Chalker: The know-how fund made a contribution of £8,000 towards the costs of the recent Jagiellonian foundation seminar held to discuss general questions of curriculum reform in the Polish educational context.

No other support was given by my Department. No complete record is available of the names of all those who attended, but among those who did so were:

Dr. Leo Katzen, Department of Economics, Leicester University;
David J. Levy, Department of Sociology, Middlesex Polytechnic;
Professor Roger Scruton, Birkbeck College, London;
Dr. John Marks, Director, Education Research Trust;
Ken Connelly, retired headmaster;
Professor Anthony O'Hear, Philosophy, Bradford University;
Dr. Geoffrey Partington, Department of Education, Flinders University of Southern Australia;
Professor David Cooper, Philosophy, Durham University;
President of Philosophy of Education Society;
Dr. Brian Davies, School of Education, University College, Cardiff;
Dr. Andrew King, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Leicester University;
Susan Wright, Department of Education, North London Polytechnic;
Dr. Lawrence Norcross, retired headmaster;
Stuart Sexton, Headmaster;
Liz Lightfoot, Education correspondent, Mail on Sunday;
Marek Matraszek, Jagiellonian Trust, Oxford;
Professor Anthony Flew, Reading University, Philosophy Educational Theorist;
Professor Richard Lynn, University of Ulster, Educational Psychologist;
Chris Coldman, Mathematics teacher, London;
Wiktor Kulerski, Minister of Education;
Dr. Andrzej Pachocinski, Department of Education, Warsaw University;
Dr. Wawrzyniec Konarski, Department of Education, Warsaw University;
Dr. Milowit Kuninski, Department of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Krakow;
Dr. Anton Kaminski, Department of Sociology, Warsaw University, and advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs;
Dr. Stefania Szscurkowska, Ministry of Education;
Iwona Langer-Kowalewska, Secondary school headmistress, Gdansk;
Magdalena Pilch, Secondary School Headmistress, Warsaw;
Dr. Witold Karczewski, Pan, Warsaw;
together with school teachers from several parts of the country, and occasional visitors from the social and political science and education departments in the university.
Dr. Nicolae Sacalis, from the Department of pedagogy at Bucharest University.
Professor Wayne Shute, department of education at Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City;
came as an independent observer.

Third-World Students

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many students from Third-world countries are currently studying in this country on *(a)* Her Majesty's Government's bursaries, *(b)* their own resources and *(c)* other sources of finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In the current financial year over 21,000 students from developing countries are receiving help from United Kingdom Government support schemes for study and training in this country. A total of 45,000 full time students from developing countries enrolled in October 1988 for further and higher education courses in this country for the academic year 1988-89, the latest year for which such a figure is available. This would include some of those here under United Kingdom Government support schemes as well as those here under their own resources and other sources of finance; these categories are not separately identifiable. The two figures quoted are compiled from different sources and in different ways and are not comparable.

Ethiopia and Sudan (Famine)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first received warnings of the current famine in Ethiopia and Sudan.

Mrs. Chalker: Initial indications from international agencies of possible food shortages were received on September 13—Sudan—and 14—Ethiopia. Confirmed reports arrived in mid-December.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all assistance given for agricultural rehabilitation and restocking of seeds, tools and cattle in Ethiopia since the 1989-90 food shortage.

Mrs. Chalker: Relevant projects supported since the 1989-90 food shortage are:

Project/Programme	*Description/Aims*
Teff Research	Collaborative research to improve varieties of Teff
Rainfall Monitoring	Rainfall and crop development estimation and monitoring system
Sidamo Rangelands	Improved food security for ten local communities in South Sidamo; managed by CARE
Koisha Rural Development	Increase food production and strengthen rural economy in Koisha region of Sidamo; managed by SOS-Sahel
Land Use—Western Hararghe	Introduce sustainable system of land use for 17,000 families in Western Hararghe; managed by CARE
Dairy Goat Project	Increase rural incomes by improving the productivity of dairy goats managed by women; managed by FARM Africa
Farmers' Research Project	Assist NGOs working with communities in North Omo region to contribute more effectively to farmers' agricultural research; managed by FARM Africa
Projects funded under the joint funding scheme	
Action Aid (Small Scale seed production)	Develop economically viable and sustainable small scale seed enterprises
Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (Rural Development)	To increase productive capacity of land
OXFAM (Delanta Agriculture)	To promote post drought agricultural rehabilitation and prevent environmental degradation of the land
OXFAM (Hararghe Agricultural)	Construct a new seed store and to replace seed stocks lost in the drought
Tear Fund (Cattle Project, Durami)	To introduce the Borena breed bloodstock into the fresian/local bloodstock to increase milk yields and help improve disease resistance

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many tonnes of food aid have been delivered to Ethiopia since the Food and Agriculture Organisation appeal of 13 December 1990 *(a)* from Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* in total.

Mrs. Chalker: A total of 19,000 tonnes of United Kingdom food aid, provided through the World Food Programme, is being delivered at Assab this week. Between 28 and 31 December 1990 some 20,467 tonnes of food aid from other donors were delivered at Assab. A total of 42,000 tonnes is expected, but not confirmed, in January.

These figures do not include cross border food aid figures for Ethiopia. The total figure for cross-border operations for December/January is estimated at 30,000 to 35,000 tonnes for Eritrea. Comparable figures are not available for Tigray.

Famine Relief

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all allocations of famine relief made to African countries in 1990 and 1991, with the date on which the allocation was made and stating whether or not the supplies have arrived for (i) aid from the Overseas Development Administration and (ii) aid from the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

United Kingdom Food Aid committed in 1990

Country	*Tonnage*	*Estimated cost £ million*
Ethiopia	53,836	8·230
Mozambique	15,000	1·740
Sudan	10,550	2·807
Tanzania	2,065	0·201
Zaire	3,725	0·446

Other United Kingdom emergency relief in 1990

Month	*Country*	*£ million*
January	Uganda	0·03
February	Liberia	0·392
March	Rwanda	0·05
April	Sudan	3·0
April	Ethiopia	5·0
June	Sudan	0·033
June	Sierra Leone	0·067
July	Angola	0·5
August	Mozambique	3·5
August	Sierra Leone	0·084
September	Ghana	0·034
October	Ethiopia	0·5
December	Ethiopia	2·5
December	Sudan	1·2
December	Angola	0·5

The hon. Lady will recall from my statement to the House on 19 December 1990 the most recent emergency aid package worth £7·2 million which is now being allocated to British non-governmental organisations and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In addition, I have today announced a further £8·75 million package of famine relief for Ethiopia: It comprises

35,000 tonnes of food aid for 1991 worth some £6·5 million.

£2 million in non-food assistance to enable the food to be delivered.

£250,000 to UNHCR for Somali refugees in Ethiopia.

This new food aid includes an immediate shipment of 10,000 tonnes of food sent into the recently reopened port of Massawa. It has not been possible in the time available to give details of the dates on which the shipments arrived at their destination.

It has also not been possible in the time available to obtain full details of emergency aid provided by the European Community for African countries affected by the famine. However, in the case of Ethiopia normal and emergency food aid provided by the Community in 1990 amounted to some 115 mecu of £80 million, of which the United Kingdom share was some £18 million. Most of this food had been delivered by October 1990.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what improvements have been made in the famine early warning systems, and delivery mechanisms of relief aid used by the ODA since the 1984-85 famine.

Mrs. Chalker: We continue to rely upon the reports of the Food and Agriculture Organisation's global information and early warning system, supplemented by special reports from both the World Food Programme and international and British relief agencies. These reports draw on information from national warning systems, to which the European Community contributes. The quality of these has improved substantially since 1984-85. The recent WFP crop assessment missions to Ethiopia and Sudan played a crucial role in the planning of our current relief activities.

In 1984-85 air drops were necessary to reach those in need in Ethiopia. We now have three established land routes for delivering relief supplies—the southern line, the northern line through the recently re-opened port of Massawa and cross-border from Sudan.

The regular meetings on the Horn of Africa I hold with British NGOs have also helped both the ODA and the NGOs in planning our emergency relief operations.

These improvements have helped enable us to take early and speedy action in response to the threatened famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the change in inflation has been from July 1983 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: The annual rate of inflation, as measured by the retail prices index, was 4·2 per cent. for the 12 months to July 1983 compared with 9·3 per cent. for December 1990. Over the period from July 1983 to December 1990 the index has increased by 52·3 per cent., an annual rate of increase of 5·8 per cent. on average.

Consumer Debt

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of outstanding consumer debt; and what it was in real terms in 1982.

Mr. Maples: The level of outstanding consumer debt at the end of the third quarter 1990 was £49·6 billion. Due to changes in coverage, comparable figures are not available for 1982. Those which are available are in the September 1982 issue of *Business Monitor* SDM6 "Credit business of finance houses and other specialist consumer credit grantors". This publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Charities

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is proposed that charities should become liable to charge value added tax on the production and sale of books, magazines and other printed matter as part of the European proposals for value added tax harmonisation; and whether it is proposed that charities would be able to reclaim value added tax paid for *(a)* the purchase and *(b)* the production of books, magazines and other printed matter.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Commission's most recent proposals, in May 1989, on the VAT rate structure in the single market were not entirely clear as to what might continue to be zero rated. Subsequent European Community discussions have advanced matters little. The United Kingdom has, however, stressed that we must retain the ability to apply a zero rate to those supplies that are currently treated in this way. These, of course, include the production and sale by charities of books, magazines and some other printed matter. As any Community legislation in this area requires unanimity, the United Kingdom's position is protected.

There have been no proposals to alter the rules in respect of VAT reclaimable on purchases and production of books, and so on.

Home Carers

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the practice followed in other member states of the European Community with respect to the charging of value added tax on the supply and delivery of goods and services to home carers.

Mrs Gillian Shephard: Comprehensive information would be disproportionately expensive to obtain. However, the provisions of the EC sixth VAT directive are clear on the charging of tax on the supply and delivery of goods and services, whether to home carers or others. I have no reason to believe that other member states' practices are not in conformity with EC law. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind, perhaps he will write to me.

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1990, what representations he has made to the EC Commission regarding the constraints of EC value added tax law with respect to the delivery of services and goods to home carers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The United Kingdom is bound by the EC sixth directive, to which all the member states gave their assent in 1977. The Government are not in a position to challenge its legal requirements.

Credit Cards

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many credit cards are in circulation in the United Kingdom; what was the comparable level in 1980; what are the comparable figures on a per capita basis in other European Community countries.

Mr. Maples: The only data available are from bank issuers of Mastercard and Visa. These show that at the end of 1989 there were 28·6 million such cards issued in the United Kingdom. The comparable figure at the end of 1980 was 11·7 million. Data for other countries could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bingo Duty

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much bingo duty *(a)* yielded to the Exchequer and *(b)* cost to collect in the financial year ended 31 March 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the year ended 31 march 1990, bingo duty yielded £66 million; no separate cost of collecting bingo duty is available; the cost of collecting all the exise duties on betting and gaming, totalling £976 million, was £4·03 million.

Personal Debt

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the present outstanding personal debts on *(a)* bank credit cards, *(b)* retail accounts, *(c)* loans on personal accounts, *(d)* specialist credit and *(e)* finance house loans.

Mr. Maples: At the end of the third quarter 1990 the amounts outstanding were

	£ billion
(a) Bank credit cards	7·6
(b) Retail accounts	2·3
(c) Bank loans on personal accounts	17·0
(d) Finance houses and other specialist credit grantors	20·7

Departmental Reports

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 1991 departmental reports to be published.

Mr. Mellor: The proposed dates for publication of 1991 departmental reports and the supplement to the autumn statement are as follows:

	Proposed date of publication (1991)
Supplement to the Autumn Statement	Friday 1 February
Department of Social Security	Friday 1 February
Ministry of Defence	Tuesday 5 February
Department of Employment	Tuesday 5 February
Home Office (including Charity Commission)	Tuesday 5 February
Cabinet Office	Thursday 7 February
Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments and Net Payments to EC Institutions	Thursday 7 February
Energy	Thursday 7 February
Department of Transport	Thursday 7 February
Department of Health and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	Thursday 7 February
Department of Education and Science	Monday 11 February
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Intervention Board and Forestry Commission	Tuesday 12 February
Trade and Industry	Tuesday 12 February
Environment	Wednesday 13 February
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including ODA)	Wednesday 13 February
Office of Arts and Libraries	Wednesday 13 February
Legal Departments	Thursday 14 February
Scotland	Thursday 14 February
Wales	Friday 15 February
Northern Ireland	Friday 15 February

Note: Copies will be available from the Vote Office.

EC Personnel (Compensation)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise with the European Court of Auditors the recent EC decision to pay £4,500,000 in compensation to 150 EC personnel; and if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom contribution to the EC.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The Government have noted with concern the observations in the European Court of Auditors' recent report on the 1989 EC budget in connection with redundancy payments to temporary staff at the joint research centre—JRC. The estimated cost to the United Kingdom of these payments is some £300,000 after abatement. The Government recognise that costs are frequently incurred when any organisation is restructured, but will want to ensure that measures taken to correct staff imbalances at the JRC do not result in unwarranted expenditure and that they will have the intended effect. The Government will therefore aim to pursue this issue in forthcoming Council discussions on the European Court of Auditors' report and in the review of the JRC planned for later this year.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* unoccupied housing executive houses there are, *(b)* priority applicants are on the waiting list, *(c)* transfers are listed and *(d)* housing executive houses have been sold in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990, in Newtownabbey borough council area.

Mr. Needham: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I am advised by its chief executive that the information requested in respect of the Newtownabbey borough council district is as follows:

(a) At 31 December 1990 there were 44 unoccupied Housing Executive dwellings available for letting.

(b) The number of priority applicants on the waiting list at 31 December 1990 was 93.

(c) The number of applicants on the waiting list for transfer to the district at 31 December 1990 was 970.

(d) The number of Housing Executive dwellings sold is as follows:

	Houses sold
1987	165
1988	200
1989	201
1990	165

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* unoccupied housing executive houses there are, *(b)* priority applicants are on the waiting list, *(c)* transfer requests are listed and *(d)* housing executive houses have been sold in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 in Antrim borough council area.

Mr. Needham: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I am advised by its chief executive that the information requested in respect of the Antrim borough council district is as follows:

a. At 31 December 1990 there were 37 unoccupied Housing Executive dwellings available for letting.

b. The number of priority applicants on the waiting list at 31 December 1990 was 58.

c. The number of applicants on the waiting list for transfer to the district at 31 December 1990 was 551.

d. The number of Housing Executive dwellings sold is as follows:

	Houses sold
1987	129
1988	125
1989	174
1990	239

Killead Bypass

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the completion date for the Killead bypass.

Mr. Needham: Killead bypass is expected to be completed in autumn 1992.

Roads, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to remove the mound of earth at the lower end of Hollymount crescent, Newtownards; what action has been taken against the rats at this location; and if planning permission has been granted for development at this location.

Mr. Needham: Outline planning permission was granted for residential development at the Hollymount crescent site on 2 March 1971. On the detailed plans approved in 1975 the area in question was shown as open space. The Department of the Environment (NI) has attempted without success to trace the owner of the land with a view to seeking his co-operation in having an environmental improvement scheme carried out at this location. The problem of rodent infestation is a matter for Ards borough council.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many LEDU-assisted firms went into liquidation or ceased trading in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Needham: This information is available only in respect of firms that were LEDU clients at the time they went into liquidation or ceased trading. The numbers of such firms in the years stated are detailed in the table.

Year	*Number of Liquidations*	*Number ceasing to trade*	*Total*
1988	16	15	31
1989	15	11	26
1990	17	8	25

Local Authorities

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members there are in each of the 26 local authorities; and what was the total amount of allowances and expenses paid to these members by each of the local authorities in each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: The information is set out in the table.

Local Authority	Number of Members	Total amount of allowances and expenses paid to members by local authorities in each of the last five years				
		1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
1. Antrim	19	10,004	6,976	13,917	21,235	[1]20,051
2. Ards	20	17,029	11,237	16,127	[1]28,564	[1]45,000
3. Armagh	22	14,835	2,531	12,962	22,796	[1]27,007
4. Ballymena	23	14,597	7,887	18,203	27,152	30,958
5. Ballymoney	16	7,498	4,933	10,320	12,571	[1]20,771
6. Banbridge	15	10,337	4,245	14,970	20,926	17,727
7. Belfast	51	55,861	34,387	53,721	104,544	[1]86,459
8. Carrickfergus	15	13,249	6,050	18,987	[1]34,832	[1]41,012
9. Castlereagh	21	19,317	11,830	19,124	35,540	39,153
10. Coleraine	21	12,668	6,450	14,620	16,877	22,510
11. Cookstown	16	5,327	2,780	3,198	5,401	8,857
12. Craigavon	26	18,961	8,116	8,723	45,433	44,358
13. Derry	30	26,441	31,050	32,923	42,279	45,477
14. Down	23	21,537	16,842	27,430	33,092	[1]35,464
15. Dungannon	22	11,060	9,314	12,564	19,489	24,301
16. Fermanagh	23	23,843	20,748	17,362	20,994	28,308
17. Larne	15	9,978	5,694	11,063	13,167	[1]13,294
18. Limavady	15	11,778	5,172	13,460	18,640	[1]21,731
19. Lisburn	28	26,751	11,675	33,598	52,053	59,345
20. Magherafelt	15	4,149	5,232	7,350	7,058	11,256
21. Moyle	15	8,620	8,970	11,820	12,719	[1]18,978
22. Newry and Mourne	30	54,266	57,123	48,405	62,282	[1]71,804
23. Newtownabbey	25	24,220	10,182	27,360	46,125	[1]56,094
24. North Down	24	18,486	17,819	24,010	42,729	[1]35,351
25. Omagh	21	19,834	19,007	27,354	32,548	[1]33,172
26. Strabane	15	31,615	20,344	22,976	27,845	[1]38,258
Totals	566	492,261	346,594	522,547	806,891	896,697

[1] Estimates.

Women Doctors

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the recent announcement about women doctors and their careers will be applied to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The report of the joint working party on "Women Doctors and Their Careers" was issued by the Department of Health (London) on 22 January 1991. The report's recommendations have been drawn up in terms suitable for application in England only, but the Department of Health and Social Security for Northern Ireland will consider these and the action necessary in the light of needs in Northern Ireland.

Toxic Waste Incinerator

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public safety and environmental impact assessment criteria and procedures would be invoked by the Government in respect of a proposal to site a toxic waste incinerator in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The effect of a proposal to site a toxic waste incinerator in Northern Ireland on public safety would be examined by the Department of Economic Development's health and safety inspectorate which enforces the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978. The order requires every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not exposed to risks to their health and safety. Regulations prevent the granting of planning permission to proposals of this type unless environmental information has first been considered. Schedule 1(8) of the Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations (NI) 1989 applies and any planning application for such an incinerator must be accompanied by an environmental statement. These statements are available for public information.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on planning applications made by Du Pont regarding waste incineration at Maydown.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The only planning application made by Du Pont at Maydown for a waste incinerator was submitted on the 10 October 1990 for the

"installation of a solid waste burner"

the purpose of which is to incinerate only lycra waste from the existing plant. Schedule 1(8) of the Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations (NI) 1989 applies to this application and the company have been asked to submit an environmental statement for consideration with the planning application.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any Government Department or public agency has had discussions with Du Pont about the establishment of a toxic waste incinerator at its Maydown complex.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* In October 1990, Du Pont (NI) Ltd. advised the Industrial Development Board, the Department of Economic Development, and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland of a proposal to establish a hazardous waste incinerator on its site at Maydown, Co. Londonderry. In December 1990, the company confirmed in writing that an evaluation of the project was under way. Officials from the Department involved will be available for consultations with the company as appropriate.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place with Republic of Ireland Government departments or public agencies regarding possible siting for a toxic waste incinerator.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* In November 1990, correspondence from the appropriate Minister in the Republic of Ireland indicated that the Republic of Ireland government was a at an advanced stage in its consideration of a central hazardous waste incinerator to service Irish industry, that it had become aware that Du Pont (UK) Ltd. was considering the provision of such a facility on its site at Maydown, Co. Londonderry and sought the views of the Northern Ireland authorities.

The response indicated that Du Pont (UK) Ltd. was engaged in the necessary studies of all the implications of such a facility.

Informal discussion of the matter between officials has been in accord with the correspondence.

ENVIRONMENT

Empty Housing

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of empty properties owned by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The available information for April 1990 for England is in the table

	Vacant dwellings (thousands)
Local authority[1]	99·2
Housing association[2]	19·7

[1] Derived from local authorities' housing investment programme returns for April 1990. Includes 38,900 dwellings which are awaiting or undergoing major works or awaiting sale or demolition.

[2] Derived from housing association returns to the Housing Corporation for March 1990. Includes 12,700 dwellings, mainly purchased from the private sector, which require rehabilitation work before being suitable for occupation.

Homelessness

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what new initiatives he is taking to tackle the problem of homelessness in *(a)* South Yorkshire and *(b)* Doncaster;

(2) what new and additional finance is being made available to help *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* voluntary organisations to tackle the problem of homelessness in (i) South Yorkshire generally and (ii) Doncaster.

Mr. Yeo: Housing investment programme allocations to South Yorkshire authorities for 1991-92 total £56·574 million, of which Doncaster's share is £7·950 million. When these allocations were determined, the levels of homelessness experienced were taken into account, both through generalised needs index indicators and in the distribution of resources not allocated through the GNI. In addition, Doncaster MBC's proposal to provide an additional hostel for the homeless was taken specifically into account. Our two main national homelessness initiatives, involving expenditure of £396 million, are targeted on the areas of greatest need in London and the south-east. In the longer term, we will consider extension to other areas.

Sheffield and Barnsley's urban programme submissions, which include schemes directed at the homeless, are under consideration now. Neither Doncaster nor Rotherham have included such schemes in their urban programme submissions.

Applications from voluntary organisations assisting the homeless for funding in 1991-92 under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 are also currently being considered.

Unused Sites, Thamesdown

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the unused sites owned by public bodies within the borough of Thamesdown, together with their owners and sizes in hectares, as detailed in the land register.

Mr. Yeo: In 1989 individual public sector owners were asked to keep their own registers of their unused and underused land. Since then up-to-date information has ceased to be available from my right hon. Friend's register. Information on sites on owners' registers as at 31 March 1990 is available from individual owners for their holdings and from district or London borough councils for sites within their areas for which owners have deposited information.

English Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what has been English Heritage's total education budget for each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) how many school children are estimated to have used English Heritage properties in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(3) what has been English Heritage's budget for educational publications, including audio-visual productions, in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: These are matters for English Heritage.

Heveningham Hall, Suffolk

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom Heveningham hall in Suffolk was sold.

Sir George Young: I.D. Investment Development AG.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the arguments his Department put forward during negotiations on the derogation agreement with the European Community for the use and development of refuse-derived fuel.

Mr. Baldry: During the negotiations in the European Community of the draft directives on municipal waste incineration, the United Kingdom sought derogation for refuse-derived fuel in view of the considerable investment and research being undertaken in the United Kingdom to

develop RDG as an economic alternative fuel in the interests of recycling, the securing of energy from waste, and the development of waste disposal options.

Crayfish

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from the Nature Conservancy Council since 1982 recommending the listing of American signal crayfish under schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My Department has received a number of representations from the Nature Conservancy Council about this subject in recent years. In October 1990, the council formally recommended that the American signal crayfish should be added to schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. My Department is currently considering this recommendation and undertaking the consultation required under section 26 of the 1981 Act.

Nine Elms Coldstore

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his consent has been sought by the Covent Garden market authority for the demolition of the Nine Elms coldstore and for alternative proposals for the site.

Mr. Yeo: No.

City Grant, Bradford

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision on the application for £5 million city grant by 3Ds Ltd.; and how many applications are anticipated for the west end scheme in Bradford.

Mr. Key: The proposal for the first phase in the development of Bradford west end is under consideration. Discussions were held earlier this month with 3D Ltd. and further details have been requested from the developer. Once all information has been provided, the Department will be able to undertake a full appraisal of the scheme. No details are available for the likely number of any future applications arising from the proposal.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on efforts to secure international agreement on the environmental safety of genetically modified organisms.

Mr. Baldry: The White Paper on the environment, "Our Common Inheritance", recognised that the safe development of biotechnology based on genetically modified organisms—GMOs—requires the agreement of satisfactory environmental safeguards, both nationally and internationally. Good progress has been made to date. In particular, the United Kingdom Government played an influential role in the adoption last year of two European Communities directives on GMOs and has made provision in part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for implementation of their environmental requirements.

The United Kingdom is actively participating in work to secure wider international agreement on the safety of GMOs. An opportunity for further significant progress is provided by the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in Brazil in 1992—UNCED 1992. As part of the preparations for the conference, the UK Government have responded positively to a Netherlands proposal for a UN approach on biotechnology safety and are developing that proposal further in collaboration with their Dutch counterparts. The proposal aims to encourage the effective risk assessment and management of GMO activities worldwide through the development of international guidelines based on the exchange of information and expertise. The Government see this as a positive contribution to preparations for UNCED 1992 and hope that other countries will support the UK and the Netherlands in seeking to make this initiative a success.

Urban Programme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be available for local authorities under the urban programme in 1991-92; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am pleased to announce initial urban programme resource allocations for 1991-92 totalling over £264 million. The resources will be allocated to the 57 urban programme partnership and programme authorities in England. The money will be used to support a wide range of projects aimed at stimulating enterprise and the development of local economies, improving the environmental quality of inner-city areas particularly through greening, and improving the quality of life in inner-city areas.

The urban programme has achieved a great deal over many years. I now want to build on that success. Our aim is to promote vital and self-reliant communities. The key, I believe, is to target resources effectively on those areas of particular need. I also want to encourage the partnerships that local authorities are developing with other local interests: local business, voluntary bodies, and of course the people in the inner city areas.

The resources I am now making available will allow local authorities to extend this good practice already well established in many areas.

A list of the allocations to individual authorities for 1991-92 is set out in the table.

Urban Programme Allocations 1991-92

	£ million
Newcastle/Gateshead	17·096
Hartlepool	2·012
Langbaurgh	2·059
Middlesborough	5·450
North Tyneside	3·560
South Tyneside	5·025
Stockton	1·669
Sunderland	5·332
Manchester/Salford	21·749
Blackburn	4·010
Bolton	4·010
Burnley	2·173
Oldham	3·965
Preston	2·461
Rochdale	3·975
Wigan	2·722
Liverpool	19·115
Halton	1·537
Knowsley	4·177
St. Helens	1·882

	£ million
Sefton	1·742
Wirral	3·713
Birmingham	23·535
Coventry	4·772
Dudley	1·637
Sandwell	4·776
Walsall	1·763
Wolverhampton	5·398
The Wrekin	1·009
Derby	1·312
Leicester	4·990
Nottingham	5·350
Barnsley	1·832
Bradford	4·711
Doncaster	2·000
Hull	5·120
Kirklees	1·136
Leeds	5·490
Rotherham	2·000
Sheffield	6·182
Hackney	5·585
Islington	9·240
Lambeth	9·084
Brent	2·680
Greenwich	1·536
Hammersmith/Fulham	2·625
Haringey	2·865
Kensington/Chelsea	1·860
Lewisham	2·584
Newham	3·061
Southwark	2·816
Tower Hamlets	4·910
Wandsworth	3·180
Bristol	1·715
Plymouth	1·380
Outward Bound Funding Through Local Authorities	0·270
Special Regional Initiatives	3·400

Combined Heat and Power

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that his technical guidance accompanying the introduction of integrated pollution control will recognise and promote the environmental and economic benefits of combined heat and power.

Mr. Trippier: The chief inspector's technical guidance will focus on the requirements for authorisation under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, in seeking to establish the best practicable means not entailing excessive cost for preventing, minimising or rendering harmless polluting substances, and the best practicable environmental option to protect the environment as a whole, the guidance might identify the need to include conditions in an authorisation which an operator could in fact meet by the use of combined heat and power.

HEALTH

Under-fives

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of *(a)* the secretariat and *(b)* the annual budget of the inter-departmental consultative group for under-fives.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The secretariat of this group, which I chair, is found from administrative staff in the Department's community services division. There is no separate budget allocation for the work of this group. The group last met on 25 September 1990 when the main subject discussed was the Children Act 1989 and the draft guidance on day care services. The group's next meeting is arranged for 13 March, when it is intended to discuss quality systems for child care providers and consultants, and day care services on Crown premises.

Maternity Units (Security)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requests he has had for support for the initiative taken by the Royal College of Midwives to improve the security of maternity units and hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: None, but we are aware that the general secretary of the Royal College of Midwives wrote to the chairmen of all district health authorities on 13 December 1990 asking them to review the security system for their maternity services.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make available resources to improve security for mothers, babies and midwives in maternity units and hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is providing funding to the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts to update the NHS security manual which is the main source of practical guidance to health authorities on security matters.

It is for health authorities to decide how to use the funds already allocated to them in the light of local needs and priorities. The cost and efficiency of security arrangements within any particular hospital or unit are matters for the relevant health authority and its general managers.

Iran-Iraq War

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Iraqi casualties from the Iran-Iraq war were treated in British hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

St. Thomas's Hospital, London

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ownership of the vacant buildings on the site of the old St. Thomas's hospital; how long they have been empty; and what plans exist for their future.

Mr. Dorrell: The site of the old St. Thomas's hospital in St. Thomas's street, London SE1 is no longer in the ownership of the NHS.

Calorie Intakes

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Health Education Authority's recommended daily calorie intake from food for *(a)* an adult, *(b)* a child 16 to 17 years, *(c)* a child 11 to 15 years, *(d)* a child six to 10 years, *(e)* a child three to five years and *(f)* a child up to two years.

Mr. Dorrell: The Health Education Authority has not made any recommendations on daily calorie intakes. Advice on daily energy requirements is provided by the chief medical officer's independent Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy—COMA. Current advice —for males and females in different age bands from those requested—is contained in the COMA report "Recommended Daily Amounts of Food Energy and Nutrients for Groups of People in the United Kingdom" published in 1979. Copies are available in the Library. COMA is nearing completion of a re-assessment of the evidence and publication of an updated report is expected later this year.

Nuclear Power Station, Dungeness

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to institute a full medical survey into the possible public health implications in respect of radiation levels as a result of the operation of the nuclear power station at Dungeness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In its third report to the Government, copies of which are in the Library, the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment—COMARE—stated that investigations of the incidence of childhood cancer in the vicinity of nuclear installations would be difficult to interpret until the results of studies of the distribution of childhood cancer incidence on a nationwide basis become available. The committee will then be asked to participate in a review of the evidence relating to the incidence of childhood cancer around nuclear installations. If the hon. Member has any information that he feels may be relevant, perhaps he would write to me.

Old People's Homes

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the privatisation of old people's homes in Leicestershire.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received no such representations.

Consultation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that community health councils are fully consulted by district health authorities and hospital trusts before NHS contracts are awarded; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: District health authorities are responsible for placing contracts with providers, including NHS trusts. They will be expected to seek the views of all interested parties including community health councils, on their overall contracting plans.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if community health councils will continue to be fully consulted before the disposal, change of use or closure of health authority and hospital trust premises and resources; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A district health authority considering a proposal involving the closure or change of use of a health building which it manages will be required to consult the relevant community health council and other interested parties about the proposal. Ministers will continue to make decisions on contested closures. NHS trusts have no duty to consult community health councils on how they manage their premises and resources.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if community health councils will retain the right to attend health authority or hospital trust meetings, including the confidential parts of such meetings after 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Community health council representatives will have the right to attend district health authority and NHS trust board meetings that are open to the public. As previously, it remains for a health authority to decide which of their discussions that are closed to the general public the community health council representative may attend. NHS trust boards will be free to extend similar invitations to their local community health council if they wish.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards he has considered to ensure that the regional health authority role in funding community health councils and as the employer of community health council staff does not undermine the independence and impartiality of community health councils.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Such safeguards have not proved necessary in the 16 years that community health councils have existed. We have no evidence to suggest they are necessary now.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to improve the community health council role of monitoring quality assurance in all health service provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have put quality at the top of the agenda for all National Health Service staff and managers. Health authorities have been urged to test the quality of their services through consumer surveys and by other means. The views of community health councils will be important and if a particular community health council has special expertise there is no reason why its health authority should not commission it to undertake such surveys.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if community health council representatives will have a right to speak at health authority or hospital trust meetings after 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's primary objective is that district health authorities should secure full, effective and early consultation with community health councils; the manner in which they do so is largely

for the authority's decision. National Health Service trust boards will decide for themselves whether to involve their community health councils in meetings.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of his Department's financial support for the work of the Association of Community Health Councils, for each of the last five years; and what the level of support will be in the next financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has provided funding as follows:

Year	*Grant (£)*
1986-87	40,000
1987-88	50,000
1988-89	50,000
1989-90	50,000
1990-91	50,000

The level of funding for 1991-92 has yet to be decided.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will directly grant aid to community health councils.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to alter the funding arrangements of community health councils. Each CHC will continue to be funded by the regional health authority which covers its district.

Incinerators

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into the effects on human health of substances emitted from waste disposal incinerators.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment on 21 January at columns *97-98*. The Government are currently funding the small area health statistics unit at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to investigate possible links between pollution from waste incinerators and ill health in the local community.

General Practitioners

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role he envisages for community health councils in respect of the work of general practitioners who become budget holders.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The responsibility of ensuring that adequate patient care is provided will rest with the family health service authority and the regional health authority. The patient will give the GP direct feedback about the service being provided. Patients will still be able to complain to a service committee whether a GP is a fund holder or not. No special role is envisaged for community health councils in respect of the work of GPs who become budget holders.

NHS Funding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding for health services was provided in each year since 1985 *(a)* nationally and *(b)* to the Doncaster health area.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows total spending by Doncaster health authority from 1985-86 to 1989-90—the latest year for which information is available—and total NHS spending for the same years.

	Gross total expenditure	
	NHS England (£ million)	*Doncaster Health Authority (£ thousands)*
1985-86	14,923	48,842
1986-87	16,060	53,520
1987-88	17,659	60,197
1988-89	19,606	68,670
1989-90	21,139	73,298

Notes:

The source for the Doncaster spending figure is the annual accounts of Doncaster health authority. The figures in the table include the cost of capital schemes borne by the district and those borne in the accounts of Trent regional health authority for the district.

HIV

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how long a person claiming payments, as a haemophiliac infected with HIV through NHS treatment, must wait before receiving full payment of the moneys awarded;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that haemophiliac payment claims relating to HIV contamination are dealt with quickly and in full; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The detailed provisions of the proposed settlement are under discussion with lawyers representing the plaintiffs. Payments will be made as quickly as possible once a settlement has been reached and agreed by the courts.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has received concerning mosquitoes and other biting insects as vectors for HIV and other blood-transmitted conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no evidence that mosquitoes and other biting insects act as biological vectors of HIV or blood-borne hepatitis viruses.

Cholesterol Tests

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of tests for high cholesterol blood counts carried out, and the corresponding number of such tests requested, for each health authority, for the latest available year.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Hospital Costs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average cost of *(a)* building a hospital and *(b)* running a hospital for one year.

Mr. Dorrell: The average capital cost of a 300-bed district general hospital designed in accordance with principles recommended by the Department would be about £32·5 million at current prices. The running cost of such a hospital would be about £15 million per annum.

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the numbers of people waiting, by region, for kidney transplants and the trends in transplants and available treatment for those awaiting a donor kidney.

Mrs. Bottomley: The table gives the number of people waiting for kidney transplants by region as at 18 January 1991. The number of cadaveric kidney transplants performed in the United Kingdom has risen from 849 in 1978 to 1,732 in 1989; an increase of 104 per cent. The most common forms of treatment available for those awaiting a transplant are haemodialysis and continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis. The number of renal patients receiving such treatment has risen from 2,947 in 1978 to 7,751 in 1988; an increase of 163 per cent.

	Number
Northern	229
Yorkshire	187
Devon	321
East Anglia	321
North West Thames	207
North East Thames	419
South West Thames	292
South East Thames	78
Western	100
Oxford	81
South Western	220
West Midlands	397
Mersey	96
North Western	281
Wales	96
Scotland	436
Northern Ireland	76
TOTAL	3,620

Source: United Kingdom Transplant Service.

Heart Attacks

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many men had heart attacks for each of the last three years for which figures are available aged *(a)* 20 to 30 years, *(b)* 31 to 40, *(c)* 41 to 50, *(d)* 51 to 60 and *(e)* 61 to 70 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested. The table gives, by age, the number of deaths of men caused by acute myocardial infarction in the last three years for which figures are available.

Age	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
20-29	20	27	27
30-39	307	294	246
40-49	1,744	1,600	1,441
50-59	6,163	5,451	4,861
60-69	14,454	13,984	12,955

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Dental Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of dental examinations in each of the last 12 quarters.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on the number of dental examinations scheduled for payment under the general dental services in England and Wales in each of the last 12 quarters is provided in the table:

General Dental Services: Number of Examinations Scheduled for Payment (including Trauma) by quarter for England and Wales

Quarter ending	*Number of treatments*
March 1988	7,530,040
June 1988	7,433,470
September 1988	7,948,830
December 1988	8,292,230
March 1989	7,948,220
June 1989	7,793,040
September 1989	7,378,850
December 1989	7,449,590
March 1990	7,084,060
June 1990	7,738,310
September 1990	7,390,200
December 1990	Not available

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the costs of the general dental service came from patients' charges in each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The proportion of gross costs of the general dental service in England met from patient charges is given in the table:

Charge income as a proportion of gross cost

	Per cent.
1985-86	29·8
1986-87	29·9
1987-88	29·4
1988-89	30·7
1989-90	38·7

New NHS Facilities

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify by district the new national health service facilities which are planned to be opened after 1 April.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information held centrally, 96 schemes each costing over £1 million are due for completion between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1992. A list of these has been placed in the Library. The Department does not routinely collect information on smaller schemes or hold details of health authorities' plans for the opening of new facilities.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce NHS trusts' external financing limits for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The external financing limits for 1991-92 for all NHS trusts which will become operational on 1 April 1991, excluding that for the Northern Devon healthcare trust which will be announced later, are set out in the table. These limits do not include provision for medical audit and resource management developments in trusts which will be added subsequently.

Capital expenditure by NHS trusts forms part of the public expenditure provision in the health programme. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990, however, provides no power for the Department to fund NHS trusts directly or to give them cash limits. Trusts can only obtain funding from the income they receive from purchasers or from borrowing. An annual external financing limit—EFL—controls access by NHS trusts to external finance in all

its forms. The EFL is a net financing concept measured by new loans taken out by the NHS Trust less loans repaid, plus or minus changes in deposits. The NHS Management Executive will monitor each NHS trust regularly to see that the EFL is not exceeded.

NHS trust	*External financing limit £000's*
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	2,151
Norfolk Ambulances	921
Broadgreen Hospital	−408
Chester and Halton Community	−200
Crewe Acute	−1,208
R.A.C.T.U. Liverpool	376
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital	−1,028
Royal Liverpool Hospital	−257
St. Helens and Knowsley	1,425
Wirral Hospital	−2,369
London Hospital Group	−7,373
North Middlesex Hospital	−1,992
Royal Free Hampstead	−857
Royal National Orthopaedic	−718
Royal National N T and E	137
Southend District	−1,894
Freeman Hospital	−1,124
Newcastle Mental Health	−1,146
Northumbria Ambulance	293
Central Manchester H and C	6,809
Christie Hospital	351
Central Middlesex Hospital	−4,390
Hillingdon Hospital	−2,410
Mount Vernon Hospital	−1,116
North Herts. Acute and Community	−2,291
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre	−812
Guy's and Lewisham Hospitals	8,586
Bristol United Healthcare	−1,161
Cornwall Community	−814
Cornwall Mental Handicap	−324
East Gloucestershire	−908
East Somerset	−1,601
South Devon Health Care	−1,348
West Somerset Acute and Community	−2,320
Weston Health	3,725
Croydon Community	−125
Croydon Mental Handicap	−1,151
Kingston Hospital	−1,428
Mid Surrey General Unit	−1,361
South West Surrey Acute	−2,913
North West Surrey M.H.U.	−763
St. Helier and Sutton	2,693
Doncaster Royal and Montagu	−1,666
Lincolnshire Ambulance	84
Northern General Sheffield	7,515
Royal National Rheumatic	165
West Dorset Community	−451
West Dorset General	−1,861
West Dorset Mental Health	−268
Mid Staffs Community	265
Mid Staffs Mental Health	−662
Rugby District	8,054
Walsall Acute	−2,487
Bradford Acute	11,476
Leeds General Infirmary	243
St. James's University	3,473

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners, Canada

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of British pensioners residing in Canada are in receipt of a full British state pension.

Mr. Jack: We estimate that about 10 per cent. of British pensioners in Canada are receiving the same rate of pension as if they were in the United Kingdom. In addition, a large number of British pensioners who went to live in Canada during their working lives are receiving less than the full (100 per cent.) rate of pension because they stopped paying contributions when they left the United Kingdom and therefore their national insurance records are deficient.

Child Benefit

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state what the level of child benefit would be in April 1991 if it had been uprated in line with inflation since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The rate would be £9·55 a week for each child.

"Children Come First"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* his reply to the submission of Church Action on Poverty on the proposals in "Children Come First".

Mr. Jack: The submission from Church Action on Poverty has been acknowledged. So far, some 250 submissions have been received and it is not proposed to respond to each one in detail. We are grateful for all views expressed on the White Paper "Children Come First", they will be taken fully into account in finalising the policy and preparing legislation to give effect to our proposals.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the compliance costs of the provisions in the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

Mr. Jack: As at 25 January 1991, a total of 184 written representations, mainly from right hon. and hon. Members on behalf of employers and their organisations, had been received on the provisions contained in the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

Community Charge Benefit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of community charge benefit and transitional protection during 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what was the cost of rate rebates in each year since 1980, at current and at 1990 prices.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated expenditure on community charge benefit for 1990-91 is £2·25 billion. The estimate for 1991-92 is just over £2 billion, this takes account of estimated expenditure on the community charge transitional relief and reduction schemes for 1990-91 and 1991-92 of £384 million and £1,852 million respectively.

The information requested on rate rebate expenditure is listed in the table. Before 1982-83 assistance with housing costs was through the supplementary benefit scheme administered by the Department, and the rebate and allowance scheme run by the Department of the Environment. Housing benefit was introduced for some

supplementary benefit claimants from November 1982 with full implementation for all claimants following from April 1983.

The data for the years prior to 1982-83 are based on the rent rebate and allowance and rate rebate schemes only. The data for 1982-83 combine information from both the old and the new schemes.

	Current prices £ million	*1990-91 prices £ million*
1980-81	270	494
1981-82	390	651
1982-83	560	873
1983-84	1,220	1,817
1984-85	1,354	1,919
1985-86	1,479	1,988
1986-87	1,635	2,125
1987-88	1,714	2,113
1988-89	1,373	1,577
1989-90	1,261	1,362

Notes:

1. In 1988-89 maximum rates rebate was reduced from 100 per cent. to 80 per cent.
2. Rates were replaced by community charge in 1989-90 in Scotland.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish the details of the poll tax benefit caseload, at the latest convenient date, for *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* Warwickshire and *(c)* each standard region;

(2) if he is now in a position to give a substantive answer to the question from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, on poll tax benefit, to which a holding answer was given on Thursday 13 December 1990, written question 44.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 December 1990]:* The latest available information, counting couples as one claim, and based on benefit caseload processed by 31 August 1990 is in the table.

	Caseload
Coventry	42,511
Warwickshire	45,864
Standard Regions	
North (including Cumbria)	499,000
Yorks and Humberside	658,000
East Midlands	486,000
East Anglia	223,000
London	675,000
South East (excluding London)	933,000
South West	466,000
West Midlands	664,000
North West (excluding Cumbria)	963,000
Wales	381,000
Scotland	778,000

Source: Community Charge Benefit and Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly stock count of claims at 31 August 1990.

The August 1990 figures are likely to underestimate the current position because some authorities still had a number of unprocessed claims at that time.

Pensioners

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the answer given to the then hon. Member for Kensington on 14 July 1987, *Official Report*, column *451*, showing the number of pensioners with gross weekly incomes other than the state basic pension of up to £5, £5 to £10, £10 to £15, £15 to £20, £20 to £30, £30 to £40, £40 to £50, £50 to £60, £60 to £70, £70 to £80, £80 to £90, £90 to £100, £100 to £110, £110 to £120, £120 to £130, £130 to £140, £140 to £150, £150 to £200, £250 to £300, £300 to £400, £400 to £500 and over £500, distinguishing between single and married pensioners.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table.

	Numbers (000s)	
	Married	*Single*
Up to £5	130	610
£5 to £10	110	360
£10 to £15	120	450
£15 to £20	150	480
£20 to £30	330	990
£30 to £40	230	450
£40 to £50	180	220
£50 to £60	130	160
£60 to £70	120	110
£70 to £80	110	80
£80 to £90	120	100
£90 to £100	70	80
£100 to £110	50	60
£110 to £130	110	70
£130 to £150	100	50
£150 to £200	120	70
£200 and over	280	120

Note: The figures show respectively thousands of pensioner married couples and single pensioners. The income bands have been aggregated in some cases to provide a statistically adequate sample.
Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1987.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the claim of Mr. K O (Ref. RM 173P/CO999/71/83/3) for sickness benefit and the reasons for the delays in this case.

Mr. Jack: The office of determination of contribution questions now has the information required to give a decision. A notice of that decision, given on behalf of the Secretary of State by an authorised officer of the Department, will be sent to Mr. O's solicitor, together with an explanatory covering letter, within the next few days. Any delay was due to the complexity of the case and the need thoroughly to investigate Mr. O's national insurance and benefits position over a period of 21 years.

Social Fund Loans

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of converting all outstanding social fund loans into grants.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The cost of converting all social fund loans outstanding on 31 December 1990 into grants would be £137 million.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated full year revenue effect in 1990-91 and 1991-92 of *(a)* abolishing the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions, *(b)* allowing personal allowances against such contributions and *(c)* *(a)* and *(b)* together.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The revenue effects of the measures described are estimated to be as follows:

National insurance contribution revenue effect

	1990-91 £ billion	*1991-92 £ billion*
(a)	+2·5	+2·5
(b)	−1·5	−1·5
(c)	+1·0	+1·0

The estimates assume a contribution-free band of employees' earnings up to a lower earnings limit equivalent to a single person's income tax allowance and a 9 per cent. contribution rate on earnings above that limit.

SCOTLAND

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Lang: A wide range of positive measures, including energy surveys of buildings and the active promotion of good housekeeping practices, has been, and will continue to be, undertaken. Very useful savings have been secured in recent years by positive management related to the setting of realistic but demanding targets. Because of changes in Departmental responsibility and limits on the data available it is not possible to give precise figures on a satisfactory basis for year on year comparisons of total expenditure.

Expenditure

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each year since 1974-75 *(a)* the total national health service expenditure and *(b)* the capital expenditure, in Scotland, giving the figures at constant prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is set out in the following table:

(a) Total National Health Service Expenditure in Scotland

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1990-91 prices*
1974-75	458	2,079
1975-76	603	2,181
1976-77	685	2,182
1977-78	777	2,177
1978-79	893	2,257
1979-80	1,064	2,304
1980-81	1,343	2,458
1981-82	1,531	2,555
1982-83	1,660	2,587
1983-84	1,773	2,640
1984-85	1,901	2,695
1985-86	2,015	2,709
1986-87	2,144	2,787
1987-88	2,328	2,870
1988-89	2,591	2,977
1989-90	2,819	3,045
[1]1990-91	3,102	3,102

[1] Provision

(b) Total Capital Expenditure on the National Health Service in Scotland

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1990-91 prices*
1974-75	33	150
1975-76	42	152
1976-77	41	131
1977-78	42	118
1978-79	56	142
1979-80	66	143
1980-81	67	174
1981-82	95	159
1982-83	104	162
1983-84	108	161
1984-85	118	167
1985-86	132	177
1986-87	116	150
1987-88	120	148
1988-89	131	150
1989-90	174	188
1990-91[1]	205	205

[1] Provision includes £16 million for value added tax following the ending of exemption from value added tax of NHS capital expenditure.

Health Service

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of Scottish gross domestic product has been allocated to the health service in Scotland in each year since 1978.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Total national health service expenditure in Scotland as a percentage of Scottish gross domestic product is set out in the following table for the years for which information on Scottish GDP is available:

	Per cent.
1978-79	6·8
1979-80	7·1
1980-81	7·9
1981-82	8·2
1982-83	8·1
1983-84	8·0
1984-85	8·1
1985-86	7·9
1986-87	7·7
1987-88	7·7
1988-89	7·7

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board the amount spent on advertising for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available from health boards' annual accounts about advertising costs is shown in the table:

Health board	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Argyll and Clyde	102,687	90,722	108,859
Ayrshire and Arran	71,459	98,574	103,198
Borders	36,331	49,516	36,727
Dumfries and Galloway	25,950	24,141	32,639
Fife	99,243	65,989	132,734
Forth Valley	50,248	48,293	93,632
Grampian	88,909	126,015	160,409
Greater Glasgow	153,086	227,574	616,149
Highland	49,565	45,111	95,380
Lanarkshire	55,872	68,742	102,528
Lothian	140,231	160,636	321,733
Orkney	1,848	3,559	1,990
Shetland	7,102	12,065	25,862
Tayside	79,968	83,774	126,956
Western Isles	21,956	18,282	21,664
Total	984,455	1,122,993	1,980,460

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of environmentally sensitive area-related grant paid out in each of the environmentally sensitive areas since their inception; what is the total number of individual grant recipients in each environmentally sensitive area; and what is the estimated total number of eligible individuals in each environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Area	*Estimated number of eligible Farmers/ Crofters*	*Total number of individual grant recipients*	*Total amount of ESA payments made*
Breadalbane	150	96	567,378·77
Loch Lomond	80	35	132,028·70
Stewartry	285	127	640,854·63
Whitlaw and Eildon	65	17	66,257·80
The Machair of the Uists, Benbecula, Barra and Vatersay	660	419	278,593·46

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total budget available to the Highlands and Islands Development Board in the current financial year, broken down into constituent areas.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is not available.

Training

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about new training measures in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Apart from the training credits pilot, which will become operational under the management of Grampian Enterprise Limited on 1 April 1991, there are no new national training measures to be introduced in Scotland in 1991-92. However, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and local enterprise companies will become fully operational on 1 April 1991 and will have full responsibility for administration of the Government's training programmes in Scotland.

The local enterprise companies, in preparing their businees plans, have been encouraged to adopt an innovative approach to the provision of training in their areas; and it is clear from the business plans which I have seen that they have risen to this challenge and have developed many interesting new approaches to deal with training needs in their area. Decisions on development of these ideas into operational concepts have yet to be taken by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and individual local enterprise companies, in the light of the resources available to them and their own priorities.

Gulf Casualties

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make additional funds available to health boards to ensure that hospital operations postponed because of the Gulf crisis can be carried out within a reasonable time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards have been promised that the full cost of treating Gulf casualties will be met. The resources available to them for treatment of their catchment population will continue to be available for that purpose.

Student Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his most up-to-date estimate of the amount spent per head per full-time equivalent student in public sector Scottish higher education colleges in *(a)* this financial year and *(b)* next financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I estimate that £4,150 of Government funding per full-time equivalent student was provided to the Scottish grant-aided colleges of higher education in 1990-91, including recurrent grant-in-aid and tuition fees paid through the student awards system but excluding grants for capital expenditure and maintenance awards. The figure for 1991-92 is not available since grant-in-aid funding for that year has not yet been announced.

Penal Institutions (Governors)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish by institution the salary scales of the governors of penal institutions in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information, by institution on the complement and grades of governors and the salary scales appropriate to each grade is set out in the table.

Establishment	Governor 1	Governor 2	Governor 3	Governor 4	Governor 5
Aberdeen	—	—	1	1	1
Barlinnie	1	1	—	5	10
Barlinnie SU	—	—	1	—	1
Castle Huntly	—	—	1	—	2
Cornton Vale	—	1	—	2	4
Dumfries	—	—	1	1	3
Dungavel	—	—	1	1	2
Edinburgh	1	—	1	3	7
Friarton	—	—	—	1	—
Glenochil	1	—	1	4	9
Greenock	—	—	1	1	3
Inverness	—	—	1	—	2
Longriggend	—	—	1	1	2
Low Moss	—	—	1	—	3
Noranside	—	—	1	—	2
Penninghame	—	—	—	1	—
Perth	—	1	1	3	8
Peterhead	—	1	1	3	5
Polmont	—	1	—	2	6
Shotts	1	—	1	4	5
Shotts AU	—	—	1	—	1
	£	£	£	£	£
Salary Scale	39,747 Performance point 41,147	35,891 Performance point 37,041	30,857 Performance point 31,757	min 24,560 max 26,449 Performance oint 27,199	min 22,514 max 23,930 Performance point 24,530

Prison Service

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the grades and salary scales applicable to the prison service in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Unified grades	Salary £
Governor 1	39,747
	[1]41,147
Governor 2	35,891
	[1]37,041
Governor 3	30,857
	[1]31,757
Governor 4	24,560
	25,505
	26,449
	[1]27,199
Governor 5	22,514
	22,859
	23,930
	[1]24,530
Principal Officer	17,760
	18,162
	18,736
Senior Officer	17,015
Officer	12,424
	12,768
	13,170
	13,572
	13,975
	14,490
	15,293
12 year point	15,580
15 year point	15,924
Steward 1	26,449
	[1]27,199
Steward 2	24,560
	[1]25,310
Chief Clerk Officer	22,859
	23,930
	[1]24,530
Principal Clerk Officer	17,015
	17,358
	17,702
	18,046
	18,388
	18,736
Clerk Officer	13,105
	13,572
	13,975
	14,490
	15,293
12 year point	15,580
15 year point	15,924
Higher Instructional Officer	14,552
	14,851
	15,468
Instructional Officer	13,145
	13,415
	13,691
	[1]14,259
	[1]14,851
	[1]15,468
Trainee typists	
Age 16	4,121
17	4,561
18	5,400
19	5,778
	[1]5,977
	[1]6,182

Unified grades	Salary £
Typist	5,977
	6,395
	6,843
	7,322
	7,834
	[1]8,104
	[1]8,383
Personal Secretary	7,834
	8,383
	8,969
	9,598
	[1]9,928
	[1]10,270
Trainee Telephonist	7,049
	7,747
Telephonist	8,345
	8,575
	8,862
Messenger	
Age 16	4,438
17	4,891
18	6,098
19	6,447
20	6,791
	7,021
	7,309
	7,654
	7,942
Stores Officer Grade B	13,262
	13,821
	14,381
	14,956
	15,553
	16,176
	16,822
	[1]17,496
	[1]18,194
	[1]18,925
	[1]19,681
Stores Officer Grade C	10,466
	11,026
	11,586
	12,143
	12,704
	13,262
	13,821
	14,381
	[1]14,956
	[1]15,553
	[1]16,176
	[1]16,822
Stores Officer Grade D	9,348
	9,907
	10,466
	11,026
	11,586
	12,143
	12,704
	[1]13,262
	[1]13,821
	[1]14,381
	[1]14,956
Senior Medical Officer	32,551
	33,970
	35,451
	36,997
	[1]38,610
	[1]40,116
	[1]41,681
	[1]43,307
Medical Officer (full time)	24,997
	26,121
	27,299
	29,809
	32,551
	33,970
	[1]35,451
	[1]36,997
	[1]38,610
Part-time Medical Officer Basic annual rate per hour	7·80
Chaplin	13,262
	Weekly pay £
Storeperson	154·50
Tradesman	164·17
Senior Storeman/woman	144·47
Storeman/woman	139·45
Civilian Driver (HGV) Band 8	139·45
Civilian Driver (HGV) Band 6	136·94
Civilian Driver (Vehicle up to 2 tons)	134·43
Sewage Attendant	134·43
Stoker (Grade C)	134·43
Stoker/Boilerman	131·93
Storekeeper Assistant	131·93
Labourer and Watchman	129·42
	Hourly rate
Watchman/Porter	3·318
Weekend Watchman (casual)	3·318
Temporary Female Assistants (casual)	4·513

[1] Performance points.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prison officers *(a)* joined and *(b)* left the prison service in each of the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows. The statistics for those leaving the Scottish prison service includes retirals, resignations and dismissals. The larger number of staff recruited in 1988 reflects the increase in manpower required to implement the "fresh start" initiative of eliminating overtime.

	(a) Joined	*(b) Left*
1986	275	160
1987	286	141
1988	406	184
1989	130	192
1990	194	74

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by institution the establishment of all penal institutions in Scotland and the current vacancies, and at which grades in each case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information, by institution, is as follows. The complement figures are as at 1 April 1990 and the vacancy profile is as at January 1991.

Establishment	*Basic Grade (Discipline)*		*Senior Officer (Discipline)*		*Principal Officer (Discipline)*		*Governor Grades*		*Specialists*[1]	
	Complement	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*	*Complement*	*Vacancies*
Aberdeen	70	5	10	—	4	—	3	—	26	1
Barlinnie	303	12	27	—	32	—	17	—	136	1
Barlinnie SU	11	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	—	—
Castle Huntly	29	—	5	—	2	—	3	1	30	2
Cornton Vale	111	5	18	—	10	—	7	—	44	1
Dumfries	73	—	7	—	4	—	5	1	33	—
Dungavel	26	—	5	—	2	—	4	—	29	—
Edinburgh	209	7	29	—	24	—	12	—	100	7
Friarton	28	1	3	—	2	1	1	—	18	1
Glenochil	232	13	34	—	22	—	15	—	100	3
Greenock	81	5	13	—	6	—	5	—	38	4
Inverness	58	—	9	1	2	—	3	—	17	1
Longriggend	93	1	18	1	6	—	4	—	28	—
Low Moss	66	1	10	—	4	—	4	—	41	—
Noranside	27	1	4	—	2	—	3	1	27	3
Penninghame	13	1	2	—	2	—	1	—	17	1
Perth	198	—	24	—	16	—	13	—	98	6
Peterhead	202	7	24	1	16	3	10	—	55	7
Polmont	130	—	23	—	23	—	9	—	52	2
Shotts	209	10	16	1	16	1	11	—	94	5
Shotts AU	17	—	3	—	2	—	2	—	—	—

[1] Including: Caterers, Works, PEIs, Nurses, Clerks, Instructors, Medical Officers.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will initiate a study of the causeway/barrage proposal put forward by Mr. Peter Findlay, as an alternative to the proposed Skye bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Both the Scottish Office and the Department of Energy are already aware of Mr. Findlay's proposals. Decisions on investment in additional electricity generating capacity are for the industry to take in the light of its own assessment of present and future needs, having regard to the quantity and diversity of plant already on the system as well as the economic viability of potential new developments. I will not therefore be initiating a study into any possible alternative to the bridge. The plans for the construction of the Skye bridge will not be delayed or put in abeyance as a consequence of Mr. Findlay's proposals.

Gartcosh

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Scottish Development Agency to discuss the future development of the former British Steel Corporation site at Gartcosh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no current plans for a meeting on this matter. The Scottish Development Agency has sold part of the site for redevelopment, and potential uses for the remainder are being discussed with interested parties.

Land Compensation

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many owner occupiers and how many tenants received compensation due to displacement of their houses, under the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973, for each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* Information on the numbers of owner occupiers and tenants who received compensation for the compulsory purchase of their houses is not held centrally. Details are however available on the numbers of home loss payments and disturbance payments made under the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1973. The figures are:

Financial year	*Number of home loss payments*	*Number of disturbance payments*
1979-80	1,645	2,034
1980-81	396	928
1981-82	337	192
1982-83	291	673
1983-84	119	342
1984-85	136	2
1985-86	102	3
1986-87	34	45
1987-88	119	64
1988-89	130	150

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the staffing complement of the new Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland includes an education officer or adviser; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The allocation of duties to staff is a matter for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. The promotion of education and advice on conservation is a key task for the new body.

Steel Industry (Lanarkshire)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs have been lost in the steel industry in Lanarkshire since 1974; and how many people are still employed in the steel industry in Lanarkshire.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The net loss in employment in the steel industry in Lanarkshire between 1974 and 1989 is almost 10,000 jobs. Of this figure, just under half were lost due to closures and just over half due to contractions. The provisional employment figure for mid 1989 was 5,600.

Environmental Education

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he intends to seek the advice of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds concerning the development and implementation of environmental education in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The views of the RSPB and other voluntary environmental bodies operating in Scotland on environmental education are of considerable importance to the development of a national strategy for environmental education in Scotland. This is the task of a working group, established by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in September 1990, which I know is currently consulting the RSPB and other such organisations in Scotland.

EMPLOYMENT

Pre-entry Closed Shop

14. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers he estimates will be affected by the provisions contained in the Employment Act 1990 to outlaw the pre-entry closed shop.

Mr. Howard: In 1989 there were some 1·3 million people working in pre-entry closed shops. As a result of the Employment Act 1990, pre-entry closed shops can no longer be lawfully established or maintained. That can be only of benefit to all employees and to all those seeking work.

Tourism

16. **Sir Robert McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effect on investment in tourism projects in England of the termination of section 4 grants.

Mr. Jackson: My Department commissioned consultants to look into projects which had been affected by the suspension of section 4 funding in England. The main finding was that, at the time the research was carried out, most of these projects had already gone ahead.

Training and Enterprise Councils

17. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to alter the funding of training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have agreed a number of changes in the way training and enterprise councils will be funded from April 1991. These changes, which have been warmly welcomed by the TECs, will result in TECs having more freedom to deploy their resources more effectively. May I add how very much I am looking forward to launching the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC this Friday.

Disabled People

18. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to increase employment opportunities for disabled persons.

Mr. Jackson: My Department provides a wide range of services and schemes specifically designed to help people with disabilities. Following an extensive consultation exercise my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is presently considering how to make the Department's services more effective for people with disabilities.

21. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many submissions he has received in response to the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Jackson: By 21 January my Department had received 353 replies.

Labour Statistics

19. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were in employment in June 1979 and June 1990.

Mr. Howard: The work force in employment in the United Kingdom stood at 25,365,000 in June 1979 and at 27,336,000 in June 1990—an increase of just under 2 million over the period.

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to alter the methods used to count the number of unemployed.

Mr. Jackson: The monthly unemployment figures will continue to be based on the claimant unemployed. These figures are supplemented by annual labour force survey information on the international definition. From 1992 the latter will be available on a quarterly basis.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the seasonally adjusted unemployment figures for each month of 1990, by district, in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Jackson: Seasonally adjusted unemployment figures are not available below regional level. Unadjusted figures for the local authority districts in Yorkshire and Humberside are available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Training Schemes

20. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the total numbers of people on training schemes and not registered as unemployed for the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson: There are about 200,000 people on employment training and 350,000 on youth training. None of these people is registered as unemployed.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently on courses under the employment training and youth training schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: There are about 200,000 people on employment training and 350,000 on youth training. I am pleased that so many people are taking advantage of the Government's significant investment in training.

Small Shops

24. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the employment and economic implications for small shops of the proposals to amend the European Commission's working time directive to make Sundays and weekends compulsory rest days.

Mr. Forth: The European Commission has told the European Parliament that in view of different traditions and practices they do not recommend that weekly rest days should be harmonised across the Community. The United Kingdom Government believe a blanket prohibition of Sunday or weekend working would be extremely damaging to the interests of consumers and employers generally.

25. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will announce current progress on the operation of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Howard: Excellent progress is being made in setting up training and enterprise councils. All 82 TECs in England and Wales are now in place, with 46 fully operational. By summer, the full network will be fully operational, almost two years ahead of schedule.

Long-term Unemployment

26. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to help the long-term unemployed back into work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Long-term unemployment is at its lowest level for eight years and the number of claimants unemployed for a year or more has fallen by 849,000 since April 1986. We are helping long-term unemployed people get back into work through an extensive range of employment and training measures. These are kept under regular review and in November I announced that next year my Department will provide up to 100,000 additional opportunities for long-term unemployed people through programmes such as job club and the job interview guarantee.

Computer Personnel, London

27. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has concerning the number of unfilled vacancies for computer personnel in Greater London.

Mr. Jackson: In Greater London in December 1990 there was one vacancy for computer personnel, which had been notified to a jobcentre. There may be many more advertised elsewhere.

Employment Contracts

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what statutory provisions regulate the amount of notice employers must give before changing an employee's contract of employment without any discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: In general, the terms and conditions contained in a contract of employment and changes to them are a matter for the parties to the contract and are not governed by legislation. Changes to contractual terms can only be made with the consent of both parties unless the contract of employment contains a term allowing the employer to make unilateral changes. An employer may give notice to terminate an existing contract and offer employment on new terms and conditions. In that case the employee will be entitled to the minimum notice laid down by statute or contractual notice, whichever is greater.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the organisations he consulted on the effect on small and medium sized firms of the new proposals on the reimbursement of statutory sick pay.

Mr. Forth: Consultation on the Statutory Sick Pay Bill is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. However, I have welcomed the opportunity to discuss this issue with small firms representative organisations and I have received a number of representations from them on the proposals. I have conveyed their views to the Secretary of State for Social Security and will continue to keep in touch with him on this important issue.

Decency Threshold

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has received from the Council of Europe to establish a decency threshold for low paid work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: No such proposals have been received. Pay is a matter for negotiators to determine in the light of their particular circumstances.

Unemployment, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary State for Employment how many people are currently registered as unemployed in the SW2 and SW9 postal districts of Lambeth.

Mr. Jackson: In December 1990 the numbers of unemployed claimants, not seasonally adjusted, in Lambeth SW2 and SW9 were 3,183 and 3,189 respectively.

Low Pay

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary State for Employment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy for dealing with low pay for women in part-time employment.

Mr. Forth: Pay for women in part-time employment, as for other workers, is a matter for negotiators themselves to determine in the light of their particular circumstances.

Working Conditions

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary State for Employment how he intends to improve health protection and working conditions in the workplace.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Commission's plan of work for 1990-91 and beyond sets out the priorities of the commission and executive for this and the next two years. These priorities will be rolled forward into the commission's plan for work for 1991-92 and beyond.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the total amount of industrial tribunal applications received in England and Wales during *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990; what was the number which actually proceeded to hearing; and what was the average lapse of time between receipt of application and hearing taking place.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information requested is recorded in financial years only and is as follows:

Registered Applications	
Year ended 31 March 1990	31,356
Period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1990	27,698
Cases heard	
Year ended 31 March 1990	9,093
Period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1990	7,018

The information recorded by industrial tribunals does not make it possible to calculate the average time between the receipt of applications and hearing.

However, the following table shows how long registered applications take to come to hearing.

Percentage of cases coming to hearing in less than:	*Year ended 31 March 1990 per cent.*	*1 April 1990 to 31 December per cent.*
6 weeks	5	3
8 weeks	20	12
10 weeks	38	27
12 weeks	52	44
16 weeks	73	65
20 weeks	82	80
26 weeks	92	90

Some two thirds of all registered applications do not come to hearing. They are withdrawn or settled prior to hearing.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the total number of industrial tribunal applications received in Scotland during *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990; what was the number which actually proceeded to hearing; and what was the average lapse of time between receipt of application and hearing taking place.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information requested is recorded in financial years only and is as follows:

Registered Applications	
Year ended 31 March 1990	: — 3,341
Period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1990	: — 3,095
Cases heard	
Year ended 31 March 1990	: — 1,288
Period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1990	: — 1,218

The information recorded by industrial tribunals does not make it possible to calculate the average time between the receipt of applications and hearing.

However, the following table shows how long registered applications take to come to hearing.

Percentage of cases coming to hearing in less than:	*Year ended 31 March 1990 per cent.*	*1 April 1990 to 31 December per cent.*
6 weeks	1	0
8 weeks	4	13
10 weeks	20	31
12 weeks	43	48
16 weeks	72	69
20 weeks	85	83
26 weeks	91	88

Some two-thirds of all registered applications do not come to hearing. They are withdrawn or settled prior to hearing.

Part-time and Temporary Workers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) of 20 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *315*, what concerns the British Government had about proposals from the European Community for directives under articles 100 and 100A of the treaty designed to regulate the rights and benefits available to part-time and temporary workers.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The directives would unnecessarily increase directly the cost of employing part-time and temporary workers and they would add to the burden of regulations on employers. The Government believe that the response of employers to such increased costs and regulation would be to reduce the number of people employed and that the directives would therefore have the perverse effect of reducing total employment and increasing unemployment.

In addition, one of these directives has been proposed by the European Commission under the wrong article of the treaty of Rome. Article 100a of the treaty explicitly excludes matters relating to the "rights and interests of employed persons".

DEFENCE

Service Personnel

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force; and how many are non-combatant.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There were 303,003 service personnel employed in the armed forces as at 30 September 1990, including 12,677 non-combatants. The numbers employed in each service, together with the numbers of non-combatants are shown in the table.

	Total personnel	*Non-combatants*[1]
Royal Navy	54,859	2,462
Royal Marines	7,474	
Army	151,764	7,218
Royal Air Force	88,906	2,997

[1] Medical and dental personnel, as well as chaplains, are regarded as non-combatants. Musicians have also been included in the figures for non-combatants, given that they generally have medical roles.

The Gulf

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on which weapons being used by Iraq against allied forces were supplied by *(a)* the USSR, *(b)* Great Britain, *(c)* the United States of America, *(d)* France and *(e)* Germany; and whether he will consider an embargo on all arms sales from the United Kingdom and recommend the United Nations to call for an international cessation of arms sales.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been the policy of this and previous Administrations not to comment on such matters relating to other sovereign states or on specific United Kingdom exports to other countries. As to the rest of the hon. Member's question regarding possible United Kingdom and international cessation of arms sales under UN auspices, I can confirm that there are no such plans.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will enumerate by nationality the merchant seamen now serving on ships chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is not held centrally in the form requested, but I understand that British, German, Belgian, Danish, Filipino, Spanish, Dutch, Italian and Greek seamen are employed on merchant ships chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by numbers of vessels, the countries in which merchant ships chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf are registered.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Country of registration	*Number of vessels*
United Kingdom	7
Norway	11
Antigua	7
Spain	2
Italy	1
Belgium	1
Denmark	26
Cyprus	16
Bahamas	6
Greece	2
St. Vincent	1
Honduras	1
Holland	22
Germany	7
Panama	5
Finland	2
Iceland	1
Sweden	6

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many merchant vessels have been chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf; and how many are registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total number of merchant vessels chartered by Her Majesty's Government for use in the Gulf, as at 25 January 1991, is 123, of which seven were registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether any escape of nuclear material has occurred following the reported destruction of Iraq's nuclear facilities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been reported that damage has been caused to the buildings housing Iraq's two operational nuclear reactors as a result of allied air activity. The design and construction of both reactors is well known; they are small reactors and their cores are surrounded by water below ground level. We assess that any significant radioactive contamination resulting from damage would be confined to the Tuwaitha nuclear research centre.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take immediate action to ensure that the public are made fully aware of the arrangements made to allow parcels to be sent to the service men in the Gulf; and if he will ensure that accurate information is given to the relevant charitable organisations and the media.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Detailed information on forces concessionary rates for sending parcels to service personnel in the Gulf has been published through official, welfare and media channels.

Within BAOR, from where the majority of personnel deployed, the information has been publicised through forces radio, television and newspapers as well as information sheets at forces post offices and through discussions with wives' clubs.

Within the United Kingdom, similar information has been provided through unit families officers and welfare services, Post Office posters, TV statements and press releases by both the royal mail and the Ministry of Defence. A further MOD press release is in hand. In addition a royal mail parcelforce hotline has been established specifically to deal with inquiries from members of the public.

Homosexuality (Services)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men and women in the year 1990 were (i) administratively discharged and (ii) dismissed from the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force as a result of their homosexuality or homosexual behaviour; of those discharged or dismissed, how many faced *(x)* no formal charges, *(y)* summary discipline and *(z)* courts martial; how many of those who faced summary discipline or courts martial were (1) fined, and (2) sentenced to custodial imprisonment; and what were the fines and lengths of imprisonment imposed in each individual case.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Browning Automatic Pistol

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to replace the standard issue Browning automatic pistol used by British forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to replace the standard Browning automatic pistol on general issue to British forces.

HMS Sandpiper and HMS Petrel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to dispose of HMS Sandpiper and HMS Petrel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Sandpiper and HMS Petrel were paid off on 31 December 1990. No decision has yet been made concerning their final disposal.

Tornados

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current replacement cost for the total number of Tornado planes lost in the Gulf both during hostilities and during training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The question of replacing Tornados lost so far will be considered in the light of total losses sustained in the Gulf.

Desert Boots

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when British soldiers were first deployed to the Gulf; when appropriate desert boots were supplied to British soldiers; when all soldiers in the Gulf requiring desert boots will be supplied with them; where the desert boots now being supplied to British forces were made; and at what total cost of manufacture and supply;

(2) what complaints he has received from British forces in the Gulf about their boots issued at the time of deployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The first significant deployment of ground troops to the Gulf followed my right hon. Friend's announcement on 14 September 1990. A report from 7 Armoured Brigade at the end of October 1990 indicated that some individuals were experiencing discomfort with their combat boots because of the heat and steps were at once taken to procure desert boots. Following trials, the first orders were placed in November 1990. Issues of desert boots have already been made and it is intended that all troops requiring desert combat boots will have at least one pair by mid-March. All desert boots for our forces have been ordered from United Kingdom manufacturers. The cost of these boots is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

RN Detention Quarters

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is proposed to transfer the functions of the Royal Navy detention quarters at Portsmouth to the combined Army and Royal Air Force facilities in Colchester.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The future of the Royal Navy detention quarters at Portsmouth is under consideration, but no decisions have yet been made.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken to ensure that his officials and scientific advisers are using the most up-to-date medical and scientific knowledge to study the relationship between radiation exposure and subsequent illness for nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* The National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund are accepted authorities in the fields of radiological protection and epidemiology. The methodology they used in the first test veterans study, which will also be used for the follow-up study, was subject to review by other experts in the field of epidemiology and no criticism was made by them.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 January 1991

ENERGY

Energy Conservation

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of eligible homes in England and Wales currently have *(a)* cavity wall insulation, *(b)* 150mm of loft insulation, *(c)* thermostats on 50 per cent. or more radiator valves, *(d)* double glazing on 50 per cent. or more external windows, *(e)* compact fluorescent lighting in 50 per cent. or more light fittings, *(f)* energy labelling on domestic electrical appliances, *(g)* gas condensing boilers and *(h)* floor insulation; and by when he forecasts that each of these figures will reach 75 per cent. and 90 per cent. of the eligible market.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that some 19 per cent. of eligible homes in England and Wales have cavity wall insulation, 43 per cent. have four inches or more of loft insulation, 30 per cent. have double glazing installed in 40 per cent. or more rooms, less than 1 per cent. have compact fluorescent lighting in 50 per cent. or more light fittings, and less than 5 per cent. have gas condensing boilers. No figures are available for thermostatic radiator valves or floor insulation. Energy consumption information is provided in brochures or leaflets by manufacturers for the most important energy consuming domestic electrical appliances.

The Government have made no forecasts of when such energy efficiency measures will achieve particular levels of domestic market penetration.

Domestic Refuse

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether, in the light of Her Majesty's Government's stated recycling and environmental objectives, his Department makes any differentiation between the use of raw untreated domestic refuse in incineration and refuse-derived fuel.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is keen to encourage the development of renewable energy sources whenever they are, or have the prospects of becoming, economic and environmentally acceptable. This applies equally to the use of untreated domestic refuse in incinerators and to refuse-derived fuel.

Electricity Prices (Large Industrial Consumers)

Mr. Oakes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what representations he has received, and from which bodies, for the extension of the large industrial consumer scheme of electricity prices beyond April;

(2) if he will extend the large industrial consumer scheme on electricity prices for a further two years from April.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received a number of such representations. The price capping arrangements for large industrial consumers was established only as a one-year transitional measure: I do not propose seeking to extend it.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General on what dates the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal aid has met within the last 12 months; on what dates the advisory committee's legal services conference has been convened within the last 12 months; and when the advisory committee will publish its report for 1989-90.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's advisory committee met twice in the last 12 months, on 8 February and 2 October 1990. No legal services conference has been convened within that period. Since both meetings in 1990 were devoted to considering options for the future role of the Committee, no annual report will be published for 1989-90. The next report will be published in 1991-92 and will address the committee's future role.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Workers Educational Association

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how he intends to monitor local authority support for the Workers Educational Association; and what steps he is taking to ensure adequate grant for the Workers Educational Association's programme;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that changes in the financing of the Workers Educational Association will not adversely affect the organisation's activities.

Mr. Eggar: Under the arrangements for education support grant, local education authorities are expected to report to the Department on each activity for which they receive grant. Authorities have been asked to provide a short progress report on the WEA ESG to the Department by 31 March 1991. The working party of officials, which was established to consider the funding of the WEA during the transitional period, will take account of those reports in making further recommendations.

The Government have not reduced overall support for the WEA; provision is being transferred to local education authorities. We shall undertake a review during the third year of the transitional period to assess how authorities are carrying out their new responsibility for the WEA.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the new funding arrangements for the Workers Educational Association will take into account the increased administrative resource impact on district Workers Educational Associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: In several WEA districts, district secretaries already have formal or informal arrangements for liaising with their local education authorities. The new sytem of funding the WEA provides district secretaries with the opportunity to build on those arrangements. In addition, the Department's grant to the national association will now include specific provision for the costs of the

employment of district secretaries and basic administrative support. This central support will continue when responsibility for funding the districts is fully transferred to local education authorities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the role of the Workers Educational Association in providing adult education in the 1990s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The WEA is the main voluntary sector provider of adult education at local level, and I would not expect that to change. The Government wish to encourage local education authorities to take account of WEA provision within their strategic plans for further education, including adult education. Greater collaboration should enable a more effective response to local needs.

Dyslexia

Mr. Peter Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what training is given to the teaching profession on how to identify cases of dyslexia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: All courses of initial teacher training are required to equip prospective teachers to teach the full range of pupils whom they are likely to encounter in an ordinary school and to introduce them to ways of identifying children with special educational needs. This should include cases of dyslexia. Further in-service training is also available for teachers of pupils with dyslexia. Training of teachers in special educational needs in ordinary schools has been a national priority area under the local education authority training grants scheme since the scheme came into operation in 1987. The Department has also sponsored the production of an audio-visual pack to help teachers in ordinary schools to identify children with special educational needs. Part of this deals with dyslexia.

Mr. Peter Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied with the provisions made by education authorities for the special tuition of children suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Fallon: Yes. Under the Education Act 1981, LEAs have to make appropriate provision for pupils with dyslexia, or specific learning difficulties, as they have to make provision for all other pupils in their area. Decisions on invidual cases—including whether, or what, specific provision should be made—are matters for the LEA concerned.

University Pay

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the percentage increase in pay for university *(a)* teachers and *(b)* support staff in each year from 1985 to 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures are given in the table and relate to total average percentage increases during the year 1 April to 31 March. The figures take into account both lump sum payments and discretionary pay awards where applicable. The normal settlement dates are 1 April, except for clerical staff and computer operators where it is 1 July. Phased increases have not been identified.

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Academic staff						
Non-clinical	5·25	16·6	7·4	[1]—	7·0	10·0
Clincal	6·3	8·8	8·25	8·1	8·0	9·0
Support staff						
Technical staff	5·3	5·5	5·8	5·1	11·0	9·0
Clerical staff	5·4	5·9	6·0	5·0	8·3	10·6
Manual staff	6·3	8·3	7·2	[2]14·0	—	9·6
Computer operators	5·25	5·7	5·9	6·1	8·3	9·0

[1] The pay settlement for non-clinical academics agreed in March 1987 provided for an increase of 16·6 per cent. from 1 December 1986 and a further 7·4 per cent. from 1 March 1988.

[2] The settlement reached in 1988 for manual staff provided for an increase of £4 per week from 1 April, and assimilation to a new pay structure from 1 December 1988 with a minimum increase of £7 per week.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in connection with the pay awards for university teachers, support staff and technicians.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have meetings from time to time with representatives of the staff associations representing university staff, at which various issues, often including salary levels, are discussed. The Government also receive a number of letters from individual university employees.

Art Teaching

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the interim report of the national curriculum working group for art will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are publishing today the interim report of the national curriculum working group for art, together with our letter to the group's chairman, Professor Colin Renfrew. Copies of this initial advice, including our letter, have been placed in the Library. We welcome the progress which the group has made in developing the attainment targets and programmes of study for art. We have emphasised the need for the group to make recommendations that are much more flexible and less prescriptive than those for other national curriculum subjects, and that the language in which the targets and programmes of study are expressed should be simple, clear and readily understood.

Although we have concluded that it would not be right to compel every single pupil in the 14-to-16 age group to study art, we have made it clear to the group that we still wish it to offer advice in its final report on appropriate courses of study for this age group. We look forward to receiving the group's final report by the end of June.

Sports Council

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he has made for continuing the payment of Government grant-in-aid to the Sports Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Parliamentary approval for my Department to make payments of grant-in-aid to the Sports Council will be sought in a spring supplementary estimate for the schools, research and miscellaneous services vote (class XI, vote 1). Pending that approval, urgent expenditure of £14,161,000 will be met by repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 455, if he will seek to obtain a copy of the report held by the United States State Department detailing the 500 companies in 50 countries who have allegedly broken the United Nations embargo on Iraq; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

The Prime Minister: No. The United States State Department has assured us that no such publicly available reports have been prepared or published by it.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Naturalisation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of naturalisation and registration work is being dealt with at *(a)* Croydon and *(b)* Liverpool.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 31 December 1990, 36 per cent. of outstanding applications were being dealt with in Lunar house, Croydon and 64 per cent. in Liverpool.

Probation Service

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the appellate procedure available to a probation officer who is dissatisfied with the point of salary grading determined locally.

Mr. John Patten: The joint negotiating committee for the probation service makes recommendations to the Secretary of State who determines the conditions of service of probation officers by virtue of paragraph 18A of schedule 3 to the Powers of the Criminal Courts Act 1973. The existing terms and conditions are set out in the code of conditions of service of probation officers. Each probation committee has a grievance procedure which all probation officers employed by it are made aware of. The code contains a model grievance procedure for the guidance of committees. In addition, where there is a complaint of unreasonable exercise of any discretion granted to probation committees in the code, the national conciliation function of the joint negotiating committee may be invoked.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he hopes to publish, by parliamentary constituency, the number of overseas electors included in the 1991-92 electoral registers; and if he will make it his policy to publish this figure also as a percentage of the electorate.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of overseas electors included in the electoral register for 1991-92, by parliamentary constituency, will be published in the summer. We have no plans to publish these figures as a percentage of the registered electorate. We shall very shortly make known to the House the numbers of overseas electors included in the draft register for 1991-92, which was published on 28 November 1990.

Probation Officers

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to sign the agreement, following arbitration, with the National Association of Probation Officers on last year's pay award; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are considering the arbitration recommendation for main grade probation officers' pay. I will write to the hon. Member when we announce our decision, which will be as soon as possible.

Iraqi Nationals

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons were the Iraqi nationals detained in Scotland removed from that jurisdiction and taken to England.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Iraqi nationals detained in the last two weeks pending deportation on conducive grounds for reason of national security came from all parts of the United Kingdom. All were initially transferred to a central location in a London prison to facilitate interviewing, appeals and removal. Most have since been transferred to Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton in Yorkshire in the light of discussions with the International Red Cross.

Barlinnie and Saughton Prisons

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied that appropriate facilities exist for the detention of individuals under the Immigration Act 1971 at Her Majesty's prisons Barlinnie and Saughton.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes. Persons detained under the Immigration Act are detained at the most appropriate location to facilitate further inquiries, any appeal and, if agreed, eventual removal.

Criminal Records

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish his scrutiny team's report on the proposal that the maintenance and disclosure of criminal records should pass to a statutory agency independent of the police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the report of the efficiency scrutiny into the maintenance and use of criminal records in April. We will then consider the report and the question of publication.

MSM, Warrington

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what involvement his Department has with MSM, unit 9, centre 21, Bridge lane, Woolston, Warrington; and what advice the Home Office is giving them in relation to security.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Red Routes

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of parking tickets issued have been challenged in *(a)* London as a whole in 1990 and *(b)* on the red route since its inception.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Complete figures for 1990 are not yet available, but the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that, in 1989, 2,216,989 fixed penalty notices were issued in the Metropolitan police area for non-endorsable, driver-absent offences. Information is not available on all challenges to those notices, but 4,783 of them were contested by court process. Since the inception of the red route, 1,015 fixed penalty notices relating to offences on it have been recorded by the Central Ticket Office as being issued. It is too early to say how many may be challenged.

Provincial Police Forces

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to change the arrangements for inspection of provincial police forces by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Yes. I have decided that, from January 1991, the 42 provincial forces, including the City of London police, inspected annually by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary under the Police Act 1964, will normally be subject to primary inspections once every two years and intermediate inspections every other year. Primary inspections will cover the present full range of issues; intermediate inspections will involve similar procedures but will concentrate on selected issues in greater depth. Reports on all 42 forces will continue to be published each year and will contain details of any thematic inspections (ie of a particular subject area across a number of forces) relevant to the force in question. The aim of the changes is greater flexibility to concentrate Her Majesty's inspectorate's efforts where they are most needed. Chief constables and local police authorities are being told of these changes.

WALES

Sheep (Killings)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sheep were killed by dogs in Wales during 1990; what were the corresponding figures for the last 10 years and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not held centrally.

Housing Associations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make further changes in the monitoring of the activities of Welsh housing associations; and on what date they will become effective.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 28 January 1991.

Land Authority for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to review the appointments of Geoffrey Inkin as chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation and chairman of the Land Authority for Wales, and of John Allen as chairman of Tai Cymru and vice-chairman of the Land Authority for Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No.

M4

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish full details of the timetable for the completion of the missing sections of the M4 between Baglan and Lon-las, including the dates of awarding of contracts.

Sir Wyn Roberts:; Work is under way on the Earlswood-Lon-las section, which is due for completion in spring 1993. Work is planned to start on the Briton Ferry-Earlswood section of the M4 in 1991-92. Construction of the Baglan-Briton Ferry section is planned to start six months later, so that both sections are completed together by 1995. It is too soon to say when contracts will be awarded.

Rechem Plant, Pontypool

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is now in a position to respond to the Welsh Affairs Committee's second report of Session 1989-90 "Rechem International Limited: Incineration Plant, Pontypool" (House of Commons Paper 80) published on 6 June 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce that the response has been published today.

Higher Education

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has reached a decision on future funding and planning arrangements for the local authority higher education sector in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Last year, my predecessor commissioned a report from consultants, Price Waterhouse, on the polytechnic of Wales. I received the report in May in which the consultants recommended that responsibility for funding the polytechnic should be transferred from the maintaining local authority to my Department. Section 227(4) of the Education Reform Act provides for any or all of the local authority higher education institutions that meet criteria specified in section 122 to be incorporated and to leave the local authority sector if the holder of my office considers that to be necessary.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has had face-to-face consultations about the recommendation with

the polytechnic and the other institutions, and with representatives of those employed in the institutions. The Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education (WAB) has discussed the question fully. All eight local education authorities were invited to provide their views in writing on the recommendation and on the implications for the other higher education institutions of implementing the recommendation for the polytechnic. All those who have responded are agreed that whatever decision is made for the polytechnic should apply to the other institutions in the local authority sector.

In the light of the views expressed by those consulted I have now concluded that it would be in the best interests of those higher education institutions in Wales which are currently maintained by local authorities and which meet the specified criteria to be incorporated as independent institutions with effect from 1 April 1992. This will provide a period of 14 months during which they will be able to prepare themselves for independence. From 1 April 1992 the institutions will receive their funding from my Department. The appropriate transfer of funds between local authority resources and the Welsh Office's programme resources will be made for 1992-93.

The Wales Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education, which has advised me and my predecessors on the distribution of local authority funds allocated for higher education since 1983, will be dissolved on 1 April 1992. It is my intention, however, to invite the Wales advisory body to advise me on the distribution of funding for the sector for 1992-93, after which that responsibility will pass to my Department. I shall then be establishing a small group of people involved in higher education and business to advise me on the issues involved in funding higher education directly.

The institutions to be incorporated and which will leave the local authority section on 1 April 1992 are as follows:

The polytechnic of Wales
Bangor Normal college of higher education
Cardiff institute of higher education
Gwent college of higher education
West Glamorgan institute of higher education

The Welsh college of music and drama has too few full-time equivalent students to be transferred without the agreement of its maintaining authority and my officials will be discussing with South Glamorgan county council whether it should be added to the institutions named.

I shall be laying the orders necessary to give effect to these proposals shortly.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has now reached decisions about the allocation of resources for hospital and community health services in Wales for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I announced on 11 December, subject to parliamentary aproval, my decision on the allocation of resources for health and personal social services in Wales. Within the resources available I propose to provide £1,188·4 million for the hospital and community health service in Wales. Excluding the cost of the artificial limb and appliance service (which is administered on my behalf by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority) £1,078·4 million will be provided for current purposes and £102·3 million for capital spending.

For current spending, this represents a cash increase of £103·7 million or 10·6 per cent. over estimated outturn for the current financial year. In addition, a further £2·63 million (0·3 per cent.) is available, representing both savings in central funding requirements and non-recurrent funding which is available as a result of health authorities repaying loans borrowed in earlier years.

In total, therefore, some £106·3 million is available for recurrent and non-recurrent revenue development purposes in 1991-92. This sum, together with the additional £10·4 million which authorities are expected as a minimum to achieve from new cost improvements and income generation schemes, provides an effective increase in resources over 1990-91 of 11·9 per cent.

Authorities will also receive a further £38 million in 1991-92 to meet the net cost of putting cross-border usage of services between Wales and England on a contractual basis. The additional funding available next year is also on top of the extra funding which is being provided to meet the recurrent effect of the supplementary provision made available during 1990-91 for the 1990 review body pay awards.

£92 million of this sum will be made available to health authorities for their discretionary use which represents a cash increase of 9·76 per cent. over this year's estimated outturn provision. £5·1 million will be allocated to fund the continuing and full year cost of developments which are being funded centrally in 1990-91. £9·2 million will be allocated to new centrally funded developments of both a recurrent and non-recurrent nature.

These developments, which are shown in the following table, will considerably assist authorities in meeting future service requirements including those associated with the introduction of the NHS White Paper reforms.

	£ million
Regional services and centrally funded developments	1·20
Expansion in medical staff numbers and day surgery facilities aimed at reducing junior doctors hours, waiting lists and waiting times	2·60
Manpower/Training	1·11
Project 2000	1·13
IT/Clinical audit, quality assurance	1·00
Training of ambulaneemen in defibrillation techniques	0·59
Care of the terminally ill	1·00
Other	0·61
	9·24

Of the capital provision, £60·9 million will be made available to health authorities for their discretionary use, but with proviso that at least 7·5 per cent. of each authority's share of these resources should be devoted to works associated with the maintenance of the estate. The provision includes a sum of £2·4 million which is available as a result of authorities repaying brokerage loans from earlier years. This amounts to a cash increase of 10 per cent. over last year's capital allocation. The balance is required for the all-Wales capital programme, including schemes associated with remedial work in four major hospitals and with the rationalisation of authorities' estates. Further details will be announced in due course.

The distribution of discretionary resources between authorities will, as in previous years, be based on capital formula shares but I shall be announcing new arrangements for 1992-93 and subsequent years in the next month or so.

The current and capital allocations to individual authorities are as shown in the following table. These allocations do not take into account the further sums which will be allocated when decisions have been taken on the distribution of the funds reserved for centrally directed developments and on the introduction of charging for various of the services provided by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

	Allocation (£ Million)	
	Current Element	*Capital Element*
Clwyd	146·685	8·582
East Dyfed	89·184	4·382
Pembrokeshire	40·676	2·690
Gwent	156·325	8·454
Gwynedd	86·819	2·337
Mid Glamorgan	201·696	11·010
Powys	52·057	1·522
South Glamorgan	175·045	10·852
West Glamorgan	131·632	11·034

These current and capital allocations provide for a 3·8 per cent. real terms increase in overall discretionary spending by health authorities after taking into account the forecast of general inflation provided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement; and they substantially exceed the resource planning assumptions which were issued to authorities last year.

In addition, authorities will be able to retain all the proceeds of their cost improvement programmes and income generation schemes. They will also retain the income which they raise from charges for private treatment and the receipts which they obtain from the sale of surplus land and buildings. Property sales are expected to generate a further £7 million in 1991-92. In total, I expect authorities to achieve additional savings and to generate additional income amounting to at least 1·1 per cent. of their recurrent revenue allocations.

The allocations therefore provide health authorities with a secure basis, not simply for maintaining services, but for the expansion of services on behalf of their resident populations next year. Thus, although the basis of funding has changed, there should be no effect on patient services as a consequence of that change. The allocations for next year represent the first step in the process of moving towards funding each health authority in line with its weighted capitation share. I shall be announcing the way in which weighted capitation shares will be calculated in due course when the consultation on this with DHAs in Wales is completed at the end of this month.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Household Incomes

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of households in Great Britain have a weekly income of less than £100.

Mr. Maples: It is estimated that in 1989 approximately 20 per cent. of households in Great Britain had a gross income below £100 per week, approximately two thirds of these were one-person households. This is the latest year for which information is available from the family expenditure survey.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing information available to him on the tax allowances and tax reliefs given to parents in European Community member states.

Mr. Maude: The latest available information is given in the following table, which is supplemented by notes. To make a valid comparison between countries the level of child benefits given through the social security system would also have to be taken into account.

All amounts have been converted to sterling using the latest available purchasing power parities.

Belgium

Deductable allowances are given:

1 child	BF 36,000	(£505)
2 children	BF 93,000	(£1,304)
3 children	BF 209,000	(£2,931)
4 children	BF 338,000	(£4,740)

Plus BF 129,000 (£1,809) for each additional child.

Plus BF 10,000 (£140) for each child under three years (if no deduction is claimed for childcare expenses).

Denmark

No child tax allowances are given.

France

Tax relief is given by means of a family quotient system. The benefit of this relief is normally limited to FF 12,180 (£1,018) for each child.

Germany

A child deduction of DM 3,024 (£783) is granted, reduced to DM 1,512 (£392) per child if the child is not maintained by the taxpayer, but by the former spouse of the taxpayer to whom he/she makes maintenance payments. If spouses are assessed separately, both may deduct DM 1,512 (£392) per child.

Greece

Child allowances are given:

First two children—Dr 130,000 (£666) each
Third child—Dr 208,000 (£1,066)
Fourth child—Dr 325,000 (£1,665)
Fifth and each subsequent child—Dr 390,000 (£1,998)

Ireland

There are no universal tax allowances for parents.

Italy

Each spouse may claim an income tax reduction of L50,928 (£21) per child.

Luxembourg

At lower income levels, eg not exceeding LF 883,200 (£13,228) if there is one child, or LF 918,600 (£13,758) for two children, relief is given through a family quotient system. In all other cases a tax credit is given depending on taxable income and the number of children. If taxable income does not exceed LF 2,150,400 (£32,206) the tax credit is

for one child, 1 per cent. of taxable income plus LF 29,338 (£439)
for two children, 2 per cent. of taxable income plus LF 54,694 (£819).

Increased tax credits are available for parents with taxable income exceeding LF 2,150,400 (£32,206).

Netherlands

There are no universal tax allowances for parents.

Portugal

There is a tax credit of Esc 12,000 (£75) for each child.

Spain

There is a tax credit of Pta 19,000 (£105) for each child.

United Kingdom

There are no universal tax allowances for parents.

Notes

1. According to the family quotient system which applies in France and in some cases in Luxembourg, the family's taxable income is divided by a certain coefficient (for example, in France, married person with one child—2·5, married person with two children—3). The income tax table is then applied and the resulting income tax is multiplied by the same coefficient.

2. Most European Community member states give special tax allowances and reliefs to single parents and parents of disabled children. In the United Kingdom, for example, a single parent can claim an additional personal allowance of £1,720, the same amount as the married couple's allowance.

Gift Aid Certificates

Mr. Channon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the shortage of forms for gift aid certificates; and if he will ensure that the Inland Revenue provides adequate supplies of the forms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The gift aid scheme was introduced by the 1990 Finance Act. There has been a small number of telephone calls but no written representations to the charity division administering the scheme, in relation to the supply of forms. Initial demand for the forms exceeded expectations, but to date over 300,000 forms have been issued. Of these, 4,006 have been returned and processed, with a small number currently awaiting processing.

Requests for these forms are still higher than expected and additional stocks have been ordered. I can confirm that stocks and usage are being closely monitored.

Taxation

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the money raised by 5 per cent. value added tax, if it were expended as a fixed personal rebate on community charge to each charge payer pro rata rebated to rebated charge payers; by how much this would reduce the community charge paid; and what impact such a transfer would have on *(a)* the balance of payments and *(b)* the retail price index.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 21 January 1991]:* The money raised would be £8·5 billion. Assuming no change in local government expenditure, community charges would be reduced by around £225 where the full charge is made and by around £45 for those paying only 20 per cent. of the charge.

It is not the practice to provide estimates of the wider economic effects of hypothetical tax changes.

TRANSPORT

Pedestrian Crossings (Aural Warnings)

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will review the provision of aural warnings to blind people at pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Chope: Audible signals can be fitted at pelican crossings and at traffic signals with a pedestrian phase except where there are two or more crossings close together—for example at dual carriageways. In these cases it would be dangerous to include audible signal because the sound from one could be interpreted as a cue to cross at the other crossing where the traffic had not been signalled to stop. Complaints from people in residential areas about the intrusive nature of the signals have led some local authorities to remove audible signals.

The Department has developed a new audible signal for use on staggered dual carriageway crossings. It emits a localised sound which can also adjust to the ambient traffic noise level. That signal is currently being tested at 25 trunk road sites around the country. We hope it will be available to local authorities around the country later this year.

In the meantime, where it is not possible to install an audible signal, the Department advises that a tactile signal should be installed as an aid to visually impaired people. The rotating cone device is activated during the green man phase to indicate that the traffic has stopped.

Locomotives

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the type, number and age of locomotives currently in use by British Rail and their designated length of service; and what is the type, number and age of passenger rolling stock and their designated length of service.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail owned the following traction and rolling stock at 31 March 1990:

Type	*Number*
Diesel locomotives	1,835
Electric locomotives	260
High Speed Train power units	197
Coaching vehicles	13,833

The Department does not hold comprehensive information on the age of railway rolling stock.

British Rail uses the following estimates of useful life for accounting purposes, but these book lives are conservative estimate. Actual lives can be much longer, depending on a range of factors such as condition and maintenance costs.

Type	*Book life*
Locomotives	20 years
Electric multiple units	25 years
Passenger carriages	20 years
High Speed trains	15 years

Westway

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any further information on his proposals to widen the Westway at the intersection with Old Oak road and the impact it will have on tenants and home owners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The public inquiry into the western circus improvement scheme at the junction of the A40 trunk road and Old Oak road closed on 16 August 1989. The inspector's report on that inquiry, at which the impact on local residents was discussed, is now being considered. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for the Environment hope to announce their decision soon.

European High-speed Railways

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking following agreement at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 17 December to provide a complete and integrated high-speed European rail network over the next 20 years.

Mr. Freeman: The 17-18 December Transport Council adopted a resolution (11124/90) welcoming the Commission's initial report on the development of a European high-speed rail network and noting the progress made. The Council asked the Commission to carry out further studies of, among other things, the commercial aspects and financing of specific key links in the proposed network, including the proposed link from the channel tunnel to London.

These further studies will be undertaken by the existing high level working party of representatives of the Governments of member states, the railway undertakings and the rail manufacturing industry. The United Kingdom will continue to take a full and active part in the work of this group.

Network SouthEast

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will reconsider the requirement of Network SouthEast to run without Government financial support by 1993.

Mr. Freeman: We continue to discuss with British Rail the financial objective we have set for Network SouthEast and how it will be achieved.

EMPLOYMENT

Women

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list recent measures to encourage mothers to return to work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: While recognising that returning to work must be a matter of personal choice for the woman concerned, my colleagues and I take every opportunity to encourage employers to adopt working practices to make it easier for employees to combine work and family responsibilities. This means more flexibility in hours of work and leave arrangements, job-sharing, career breaks, part-time working and, where appropriate, help with childcare costs.

Electricity Prices (Large Industrial Consumers)

Mr. Oakes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of job losses which would arise from the ending of the large industrial consumer scheme for electricity prices in April.

Mr. Jackson: My Department has made no such estimate.

Jobstart

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for the future of the jobstart programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Howard: The jobstart programme started in July 1986 as part of the package of measures available under the restart programme. Its aim is to encourage long-term unemployed people to take up full-time jobs they would otherwise not consider by paying them an allowance of £20 a week for six months. An adaptation of the programme was introduced as a pilot programme in four areas in June 1989. It aimed to encourage people aged over 50 to take up part-time work as a route back into full time work.

Research has shown that the programme is not meeting this aim. A large number of participants would have taken their jobs without the allowance. In addition, it has sometimes been used to subsidise the wages of young single people.

Take up of the programme has fallen significantly in the current financial year with applications in the last four months less than 50 per cent. of those for the same period last year. In these circumstances I have decided that the programme will close on 28 February 1991. The 50-plus jobstart pilots will also close at the same time.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what European or other overseas government practices his Department has researched as part of its review of employment and training for disabled people.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* In the course of its internal review which led to the consultation document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", my Department took into account available information on the practices of all European Community countries. We did not commission specific research into this subject.

Youth Training

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many complete non-vocational qualifications at level II, or their equivalents, have been obtained by people on youth training in the last 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the total cost to public funds of youth training over the same period.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information is not available as requested. Information about vocational qualifications collected through the youth training management information systems does not identify non-vocational qualifications separately. Estimates are available from the follow-up survey about the number of people obtaining academic qualifications. However, this information is not sufficiently detailed to identify national vocational qualification level equivalence.

Expenditure on the youth training scheme for the period April 1989 to March 1990, the latest 12-month period for which figures are available, was £976 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Insurance Claims

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance he has to offer insurance companies and insured businesses and persons in respect of insurance claims arising from damage suffered to property in the United Kingdom as a direct result of terrorist activity related to the current conflict in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have nothing to add to my answer of 17 January (*Official Report*, column *595*) to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns).

Telecommunications (Wales)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response he has received to the consultative document on telecommunications in respect of Wales.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has received five responses to the Government's consultative document "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990's" (Cm. 1303) from bodies either representing Welsh interests generally or located in Wales.

Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate the part played by auditing firms in laundering cash.

Mr. Redwood: If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind and cares to let me have details, I shall be pleased to consider it.

Norton Group

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from which firms inspectors were appointed to investigate the affairs of the Norton Group plc.

Mr. Redwood: The inspectors appointed on 7 January 1991 under section 432(2) of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate and report on the affairs of Norton Group plc are Mr. John Kenneth Heywood, FCA of Messrs. Price Waterhouse and Mr. Richard George Bramwell McCombe, QC.

Industrial Electricity Consumers

Mr. Oakes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect of the ending of the large industrial consumer scheme of electricity prices in April, with particular regard to the export and import of chloralkali products.

Mr. Sainsbury: Large consumers, including chloralkali producers, have a number of supply options open to them as a result of the competitive framework which the Government have introduced in the electricity industry.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he has had with the staff of the insurance services group of ECGD regarding their preferences for retaining their civil service status subsequent to the trade sale to a private bidder.

Mr. Sainsbury: In June 1990, all staff in ECGD were invited to complete a questionnaire to state their preliminary preferences, without commitment, about joining the privatised company or remaining within the civil service. Since then, around 800 staff have been invited to individual interviews, including all staff in the insurance services group. Almost all staff invited to interviews accepted. Staff are encouraged to discuss the matter with their line managers or personnel officer at any time. When the identity of the new owners and the terms and conditions of employment they are offering are known, staff will be given at least a month to state their final preferences.

Food Safety

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many additional standards officers have been employed to implement the provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990 and the EC directive on consumer protection.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* Trading standards officers are employed by the local weights and measures authorities. It is the responsibility of each authority to employ sufficient staff to enforce consumer protection and environmental health legislation.

Motor Vehicles (Security)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research his Department has undertaken or sponsored into improvements in security devices on motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* None. There is considerable scope for improving vehicle security, using known technologies, through ordinary product development work. The industry is already pursuing this, in response to commercial pressures, and I see no role for the Department in support of additional research.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gulf

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Arab states with whom, before 15 January, he discussed the issue of linkage between Iraq's retreat from Kuwait and a middle east peace conference; and what positions they took.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since 2 August of last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and other FCO Ministers have had opportunities to discuss Iraq's invasion of Kuwait with the majority of Arab leaders. They recognised that the present crisis had to be resolved before attention could return to the other problems of the middle east.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Arab states have committed forces to the allied side in the Gulf conflict; and what formal intimation he has received from each about their war aims.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Contributions to the multinational force have been made by Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The aim of the force is to enforce the relevant Security Council resolutions acting under the authority of the United Nations as given in Security Council resolution 678.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the state of Kuwait formally requested the United Kingdom to engage in the use of force under resolution 678 of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British forces are engaged under the express authority of the Security Council in resolution 678.

The action has the support and approval of the Government of Kuwait, whose forces are also in action alongside those of their allies.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy with regard to that part of United Nations Security Council resolution 678 which refers to restoring international peace and security in the area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our objectives in the current crisis remain as defined in UNSCR 678 which authorises United Nations member states co-operating with the Government of Kuwait to use all necessary means to uphold and implement SCR 660 and all subsequent relevant resolutions of the council and to restore international peace and security in the area.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest position with the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 672.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UNSCR 672 requires a continuing commitment by the Israeli Government to apply the provisions of the Fourth Geneva convention in its administration of the occupied territories. We continue to press for this. The resolution also asks the United Nations Secretary-General to report on the situation there. He did this on 1 November.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he discussed Gulf war aims at his meeting with the French Foreign Minister on 24 January; and what conclusions were reached.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our aims in the conflict are clear and limited and are set out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Gulf crisis. There was thus no need to discuss them at my right hon. Friend's meeting in Paris on 24 January.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to seek the authority of the United Nations Security Council before considering any extension of current Gulf war aims.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our objectives in the current crisis remain as defined in UNSCR 678 which authorises United Nations member states co-operating with the Government of Kuwait to use all necessary means to uphold and implement SCR 660 and all subsequent relevant resolutions of the Council, and to restore international peace and security in the area.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with members of the Union of Arab Maghreb nations about an early meeting of the United Nations Security Council to address the issues of the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: SCR 678 authorised United Nations member states co-operating with the Government of Kuwait to use all necessary means to uphold and implement United Nations resolutions on the Gulf crisis and to restore international peace and security in the area. We see no need for the Security Council to hold an early meeting to address the current hostilities.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about recent executions of senior Iraqi military officers in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Press reports of 25 January suggested that the commanders of the Iraqi air force, and of the anti-aircraft defence, had been executed. We cannot confirm the accuracy of these reports.

Peace Conference

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to discuss with the Governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait a timetable or other relevant issue in connection with the promotion of a peace conference to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made it clear that we intend to return to the unfinished business of the Arab/Israel dispute, including the convening of an international conference at an appropriate time, as soon as Iraq has left Kuwait. Our renewed efforts to find a solution will certainly include consultations with our Arab partners in the coalition against Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how soon after the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait Her Majesty's Government will seek a peace conference on the Israeli-Arab issue.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We shall be working to restart the peace process as soon as Iraq has left Kuwait. We have long believed that a properly-structured international conference would, at the right time, be a useful mechanism, but a conference is a technique, not an end in itself. It needs willing participants if it is to get anywhere. There will be much preparatory work to be done. It would not be realistic to set a timetable now.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in his meeting with the French Foreign Minister on 24 January, he discussed the question of an international conference designed to address the Israeli-Palestinian issue; and what conclusions were reached.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A range of topics were discussed, including the Arab/Israel question. The meeting was an exchange of views and not designed to arrive at agreed conclusions.

UN Security Council

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when was the last occasion that *(a)* the United Nations Security Council and *(b)* the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council discussed the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the context of a possible peace initiative.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Arab/Israel dispute has frequently been on the agenda of the Security Council during the last three months. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the issue with his colleagues from the other permanent member states in New York on 28 September 1990.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Nations Security Council resolutions relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian issue have been subject to a veto over the past five years; and if he will show the text of each such resolution and the countries which exercised the veto.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Seven draft Security Council resolutions on the Palestinian problem and the occupied territories have been vetoed since the beginning of 1986. All were vetoed by the United States alone. I am placing copies of the texts in the Library of the House. The three most recent resolutions, 672, 673 and 681, were unanimously adopted by the Council.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest position with regard to the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 673.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The focus of Security Council resolution 673 was the report on the situation in the occupied territories requested by the Council from the UN Secretary-General in resolution 672. The Secretary-General delivered this on 1 November 1990. Security Council resolution 681 asked him to develop some of his ideas. He is now doing this.

Saddam Hussein

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give dates and names of when, during the last eight years, Ministers have personally met Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Saddam Hussein on 27 March 1983 while a Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. My right hon. Friends the then Ministers of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Richard Luce MP and David Mellor QC MP) met Saddam Hussein on 21 November 1984 and 24 February 1988 respectively.

Iraq (Human Rights)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the past 10 years Her Majesty's Government have made a formal protest to the Government of Iraq about abuses of human rights and breaches of the United Nations charter.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The precise information the hon. Gentleman requests is available only at disproportionate cost, but I can confidently state that we have repeatedly made clear to the Iraqi authorities our concern at Iraqi human rights violations.

HEALTH

Births and Deaths (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list, for each of the past 10 years, the number of births, by postal code of the residence of the mother, for each postal code area in the Doncaster metropolitan borough area;

(2) if he will list, for each of the past 10 years, the number of deaths, by postal code of the resident, for each postal code area in the Doncaster metropolitan borough area.

Mr. Dorrell: The postcode system's geographical structure does not coincide exactly with the geographical boundaries of local authority areas. The tables give the information requested for each of the postcode districts which are wholly, or partly, within the Doncaster metropolitan district. These statistics are not available prior to 1982.

Postcode	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Numbers of live births								
DN1	118	130	124	148	148	158	151	130
DN2	277	312	296	320	310	282	342	304
DN3	374	386	310	350	352	343	305	336
DN4	638	633	681	706	686	720	665	695
DN5	508	488	485	515	544	525	525	508
DN6	448	455	447	458	484	463	457	449
DN7	292	328	317	309	338	387	337	366
DN8	231	238	264	244	256	278	244	262
DN9[1]	193	201	223	188	196	201	187	201
DN10[1]	109	96	102	109	92	105	111	95
DN11[1]	363	387	426	403	373	397	416	408
DN12	397	426	385	377	394	378	361	374
S64[1]	372	379	388	453	418	446	421	419
Numbers of deaths								
DN1	128	109	128	131	125	134	142	179
DN2	305	319	302	348	345	322	321	326
DN3	190	197	224	266	240	236	252	240
DN4	643	647	647	659	635	594	629	617
DN5	421	369	375	422	371	352	403	403
DN6	312	366	335	315	343	310	331	293
DN7	184	186	188	209	219	227	207	220
DN8	156	178	170	198	174	170	195	210
DN9[1]	119	98	121	133	115	120	129	137
DN10[1]	99	114	108	100	108	96	111	132
DN11[1]	247	265	251	291	252	267	269	301
DN12	339	319	306	366	321	338	338	335
S64[1]	361	338	354	315	329	331	350	338

[1] These postcode districts contain some addresses which are outside the boundaries of Doncaster metropolitan district (as well as some which are inside).

Sugars

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to implement the recommendation of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy's report that the consumption of non-milk extrinsic sugars by the population should be decreased.

Mr. Dorrell: Since publication of the report by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease" in December 1989, action has been taken on all of the major recommendations.

The Department, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Health Education Authority has developed a set of eight straightforward, easily understood guidelines for people to follow for a healthy diet. One of these COMA-endorsed guidelines is "Don't Eat Sugary Foods Too Often". The first education booklet based on this advice was published in July 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library. The HEA is reflecting the advice on sugars consumption in all appropriate health education programmes designed to equip people to make sensible food choices.

The Government took an active part in negotiating the recently agreed EC nutrition labelling rules directive, which built on earlier United Kingdom guidelines and provides for the declaration of total sugars content on food labels. The provision of nutrition information will continue to be voluntary except where a nutrition claim is made. The Government are encouraging the industry to provide as comprehensive a picture of information as possible in order to ensure that consumers are not misled by selective claims. The provisions of the directive will be reviewed after five years. A second directive to allow the introduction of selective compulsory nutrition labelling has not been agreed; a decision on this is likely to be made once experience has been gained with the voluntary system.

The pharmaceutical industry continues to play an important part by increasing the number of sugar-free medicines, particularly those for use by children or taken over a long period.

A joint working group of the Department, MAFF and HEA, together with outside experts, is considering ways in which good catering practice can contribute to healthy eating patterns, including the restriction of sugars consumption.

Steps have been taken to inform health care professionals. The HEA have produced a briefing paper explaining COMA's recommendations. A video tape is being produced under the auspices of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation. It will be distributed to all dental practices and is designed to help dentists in providing dietary advice as an important part of their health education of patients.

Under the national curriculum, it is a requirement that pupils are taught the factors that contribute to good health and body maintenance, including balanced diet and oral hygiene.

Finally, the Government continue to monitor the population's eating habits. The national food survey has recently been enhanced to provide information on the consumption of two key foods containing sugars—soft drinks and confectionery.

Dental Caries

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will include dental caries in the Green Paper on targets for disease reduction.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is one of the areas we are considering for inclusion in the forthcoming consultative document which will set out proposals for developing a strategy for health in England, and begin the process of setting priority health objectives.

Health Targets

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his health targets for the country.

Mr. Waldegrave: We shall shortly be publishing a consultative document setting out proposals for developing a strategy for health for England, which will begin the process of setting priority health objectives. We intend that there should be wide consultation on the proposals involving all those interested in and concerned about the nation's health.

Generic Medicines

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received representations from the major manufacturers of generic medicines in the United Kingdom seeking United Kingdom Government support for the European Commission's proposed regulation on supplementary protection certificates for medicinal products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A number of representations have been received. Some recognise that there should be a realistic effective patent term for new compounds, qualified by the ability to begin development of generic alternatives within patent term to enable their marketing immediately on expiry of the patent. One major manufacturer has opposed the extension entirely.

Medicines

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has any fundamental objection to the European Commission's proposed regulation on supplementary protection certificates for medicinal products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government will be announcing their conclusion on the Commission's proposed regulation shortly.

Patent Protection

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the *(a)* French and *(b)* Italian legislation giving additional patent protection for domestic research-based pharmaceutical companies through the establishment of supplementary protection certificates; and whether he has any plans to introduce similar legislation in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have noted developments in France and Italy, as well as previous extensions in the United States of America and Japan. We believe that the issue is best considered in the context of the European Commission's draft regulation, which would override any separate national legislation.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he sought before issuing the recent circular to health authorities concerning the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act; whether environmental factors, such as poor housing, are to be regarded in the terms of the circular as a sufficient ground, constituting grave distress, for doctors to proceed with an abortion up to and during birth; and if he will publish a list of the handicaps which his Department advises would be recognised as justifiable reasons for full-term abortions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I assume that the question relates to the joint Chief Medical Officer/Chief Nursing Officer letter, reference PL/CMO(90)13 and PL/CNO(90)12, which was issued on 26 November 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library. The purpose of that letter was to inform all doctors and nurses in England about the changes to the law on abortion as a result of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The opinion as to whether an abortion is justified within the terms of the 1967 Abortion Act is for two registered medical practitioners to form, in good faith, in the light of their clinical judgment of all the circumstances of the particular case.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any proposals to change the nurses regrading appeals procedures.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Nurses' grading appeals are heard under an agreement of the General Whitley Council. Any changes to these procedures for appeals would therefore be a matter for the council.

When the nurse clinical grading structure was negotiated the management side of the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council offered to discuss a streamlined procedure specifically for clinical grading appeals, but the staff side chose not to pursue this possibility.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average cost of conducting an appeal tribunal for nurses' regrading;

(2) how many regrading appeals by members of the nursing profession are currently awaiting assessment in the Northumberland district health authority;

(3) how many regrading appeals by members of the nursing profession are currently awaiting assessment in the Northern regional health authority;

(4) how many regrading appeals by members of the nursing profession are currently awaiting assessment in the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Braille

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the cut to RNIB's braille grant.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) on 20 November at column 99. We have received a further 41 letters since that date. My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, is due to have a further meeting with the RNIB on 19 February.

Child Abuse

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each London borough, what is *(a)* the number of children, *(b)* the number on the at risk register and *(c)* the number who are on the register, but do not have an allocated social worker.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The total number of children in each London borough (estimated mid-year population under 18 at 30 June 1989) is set out in the table.

The most up-to-date information about numbers on the child protection registers relates to the 31 March 1990 and is published in the provisional feedback "Children and Young Persons on the Child Protection Registers year ended 31 March 1990". Copies are available in the Library.

The number of children on the register who do not have an allocated social worker is published in "Child Protection Services in London, Aspects of Management Arrangements in Social Services Departments, 31 December 1989", together with numbers on the register at the time at which the survey took place. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Under 18 population estimates for London boroughs at 30 June 1989

	Number
Total	1,509,989
Camden	36,525
Greenwich	51,746
Hackney	48,854
Hammersmith	30,286
Islington	36,901
Kensington	24,857
Lambeth	53,933
Lewisham	52,352
Southwark	50,914
Tower Hamlets	41,251
Wandsworth	52,326
Westminster	32,225
City of London	648
Barking	34,209
Barnet	70,282
Bexley	48,787
Brent	59,235
Bromley	62,520
Croydon	72,584
Ealing	66,281
Enfield	58,696
Haringey	43,896
Harrow	44,670
Havering	50,350
Hillingdon	53,337
Hounslow	46,870
Kingston	27,865
Merton	36,034
Newham	54,145
Redbridge	49,909
Richmond	32,181
Sutton	36,312
Waltham Forest	49,008

Source: OPCS.

Mendip Hospital (Sale)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the price obtained for the sale of Mendip hospital and the name of the successful tenderer.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Charles Stuart, the chairman of South Western regional health authority for details.

NHS Nurses

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of nurses adjusted for changes in the length of the working week employed by the NHS in each year since 1974.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The information is provided in the table. Column 1 shows the actual number of staff in wholetime equivalents for the period 1974 to 1989. Column 2 shows the estimated number of staff (WTE), based on a 37·5 hour week, during the period 1974 to 1980.

NHS nursing and midwifery staff (including agency staff) at 30 September
1974 to 1989 (wholetime equivalents[3])

Year	Actual	Adjusted[1]
[2]1974	314,100	335,000
1975	336,600	359,000
1976	341,700	364,500
1977	343,200	366,100
1978	351,000	374,400
1979	358,400	[4]382,300
1980	370,100	[4]394,800
1981	[4]391,800	—
1982	397,100	—
1983	397,100	—
1984	397,500	—
1985	401,200	—
1986	402,700	—
1987	404,000	—
1988	403,900	—
1989	405,300	—

Source: Department of Health (SMI3) Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Figures adjusted to the standard weekly hours operative from 1980-81 (37·5 hours).

[2] Comparability affected by the 1974 NHS re-organisation.

[3] All figures have been independently rounded to the nearest 100.

[4] There is a discontinuity in the time series during the period 1979 to 1981, as a consequence of the reduction in standard weekly hours at that time. The size of the discontinuity is unknown; and the figures should therefore be interpreted with caution.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Action Trusts

17. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on housing action trusts.

Sir George Young: I am always ready to consider proposals from local authorities or tenants to establish housing action trusts. They can play a valuable role in tackling the problems of rundown council estates.

I announced last week the Government's decision to proceed to a ballot in north Hull following the encouraging response of tenants there to the local authority's proposal.

I shall shortly be meeting Waltham Forest council and tenants to discuss the proposals for a trust there.

First-time Home Buyers

18. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households have bought their first homes since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: Since April 1979 over 6·5 million dwellings in Great Britain have been bought by first-time buyers. No less than 1·6 million of these were sales by local authorities, new towns and housing associations, over three quarters being made possible by the right to buy.

Local Government Finance

19. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his review of the community charge.

Mr. Portillo: Our review is making progress, as can be seen from my right hon. Friend's recent announcement of the community charge reduction scheme. We are now considering the longer-term issues of local government functions, structure and finance.

33. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has commissioned any survey or research studies to support his review of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: No studies have been commissioned specifically for the purpose of the review.

24. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he envisages completing his review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The review is intended to be thorough and fundamental. It is premature to say when it might be complete.

27. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the review of the community charge which his Department is currently carrying out.

Mr. Portillo: Work is in progress to identify the building blocks for a stable and just basis for the future development of local government.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an updated statement on his Department's criteria for community charge capping.

Mr. Portillo: As my right hon. Friend told the House on 17 January, we stand firmly by the capping intentions announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) last October.

Housing Starts

20. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of housing starts in the northern region in the last quarter of 1990 and in 1990 as a whole.

Sir George Young: The Department's preliminary estimates for housebuilding in 1990 will not be available

until 6 February 1991. However, over the three months to November 1990 there were 2,055 housing starts in the Northern region. In the first 11 months of 1990 there were 8,763 housing starts.

Liverpool City Council

21. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to visit Liverpool in order to hold discussions with the leader of Liverpool city council on the financing of the council.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to visit Liverpool later this year, but the details have yet to be arranged. I met the leader and other representatives of the council on 6 December to discuss various matters affecting their current financial position.

Business Rates

22. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the extent to which changes in business rate bills are the result of (i) the introduction of the uniform business rate and (ii) the accompanying revaluation.

Mr. Key: Almost 75 per cent. of the aggregate shift in rate burden under the new system in England is caused not by the move to a uniform business rate but by the accompanying revaluation. The total amount payable by business as a whole is broadly the same in real terms in 1990-91 as in 1989-90.

Homelessness

23. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recent initiatives taken by his Department to help relieve the plight of the homeless.

Sir George Young: We are taking urgent action on a number of fronts to relieve and reduce homelessness. To tackle the most acute problem of those sleeping on the streets of central London, we are making available £96 million over three years for direct-access hostel places and longer-term accommodation for those already in hostels. As I announced on 18 December, to carry forward development under this programme we are fortunate to have the assistance over the next six months of Nick Hardwick, director of Centrepoint.

We are also anxious to help local authorities in the areas where homelessness pressures are greatest. Therefore, £300 million is being provided over this year and next to local authorities in London and the south-east to reduce the need to use bed-and-breakfast hotels for homeless families. To help those at risk before they actually become homeless, we are establishing a national homelessness advice service through Citizens Advice Bureaux, with specialist support from Shelter and SHAC. We are also expanding support to individual voluntary sector projects to assist single homeless people to find temporary and permanent accommodation. Total support for the voluntary sector under these last two initiatives will increase from £2 million this year to £4·5 million next.

Pollution (Rivers and Seas)

25. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that the British Government meet their international obligations to reduce the amount of pollution discharged into our rivers and seas.

Mr. Trippier: Regulations have been made under the Water Act 1989 to implement EEC directives on dangerous substances. In addition, we published a guidance note in July last year concerning implementation of agreements reached at the third North sea conference.

Vacant Council Properties

26. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 councils with the highest number of vacant domestic properties.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities reporting the highest number of empty council dwellings at April 1990 were Manchester, Liverpool, Salford, Sheffield, Birmingham, Newcastle upon Tyne, Newham, Leeds, Sunderland and Tower Hamlets.

Housing (Mobility Standard)

28. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to encourage private sector developers to build to mobility standard.

Mr. Yeo: In association with the National House Building Council and the Prince of Wales advisory group on disability, my Department has supported the initiative launched by the Prince of Wales in 1985, aimed at encouraging private sector housebuilders to design all new housing to be convenient for the disabled to live in or visit, coupled with house adaptations where necessary. Disabled people may obtain assistance for house adaptations under the new house renovation grant system introduced in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and this should help to increase the amount of housing suitable for people with disabilities. Local authorities' spending on home improvement grants for works to disabled persons' dwellings in England increased from £2·547 million in 1980-81 to £51·549 million in 1988-89. In addition, since October 1987 all housing association build and rehabilitation schemes have been built to mobility standards, wherever practicable.

Household Waste (Disposal)

29. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to reduce the amount of household waste disposal of inland fill sites.

Mr. Trippier: The White Paper on the environment, "This Common Inheritance", (Cm. 1200), sets out a number of measures that we will be pursuing to ensure successful recycling and minimise waste. We will be pressing industry to increase both the recycling of materials and the use of recycled material; encouraging retailers to provide collection facilities for recyclable material for their customers; and persuading industry to expand its capacity to process reclaimed material. We will also be encouraging industry to reduce unnecessary packaging of consumer goods.

Caravan Sites Act 1968

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the workings of the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Mr. Yeo: I receive a range of comments from hon. Members and the public about the principles and operation of the Act.

Planning Legislation

31. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will introduce his new planning Bill.

Sir George Young: The Planning and Compensation Bill was introduced in another place on 15 November 1990.

Disabled Facilities Grants

32. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review his policy on the provision of discretionary and mandatory disabled facilities grants.

Mr. Yeo: This is a matter which is being kept under review to ensure that grant assistance continues to go to help disabled people least able to afford the cost of house adaptations.

Local Authorities (Responsibilities)

34. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his estimates of the additional costs to local authorities of the new responsibilities placed upon them for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Standard spending assessments for 1991-92 will rise by a total of £5·78 billion. That is an average increase of 19·4 per cent. It takes full account, among other things, of the additional costs in aggregate of new responsibilities placed on local authorities.

Private Rented Sector

35. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy on the role of the private rented sector in Britain.

Sir George Young: The private rented housing sector has been in long-term decline. The measures introduced by the Housing Act 1988 are designed to stem this decline and bring the private rented sector back into the mainstream of housing by increasing the supply and improving the quality of privately rented accommodation.

Recycling Credits

36. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress in the introduction of recycling credits.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has commissioned a study by independent consultants on the operation of a system of recycling credits. We expect to receive their report shortly. When we have considered their advice we will consult local authorities and other interested parties on draft regulations governing the payment of these recycling credits.

Capper Pass Smelting Plant

37. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on the progress being made by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and academics from Lancaster university, in their research into levels of radioactivity around the Capper Pass smelting plant in Humberside.

Mr. Baldry: The study being carried out by Lancaster university under contract to my Department is proceeding satisfactorily and to schedule. The results are due to be published by 31 December 1992.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of housing association build is built to *(a)* wheelchair standard and *(b)* mobility standard.

Mr. Yeo: Approximately 5 per cent. of housing association completions of new dwellings in England reported to my Department in the year ending September 1990 were dwellings for the chronically sick and disabled, built to mobility standards. A further 4 per cent. were dwellings for the chronically sick and disabled built to wheelchair standards.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Heseltine: Since 1985, energy efficiency in my Department has been promoted by monitoring its fuel and utilities consumption, the establishment of energy conservation targets, the implementation of energy saving schemes, including the installation of more energy efficient lighting and improved computerised building management control systems, and the promotion of staff awareness relating to their energy usage and role in its conservation.

Further measures include the proposed replacement of the building research establishment heating system and the installation of lighting controls and low-energy-consuming luminaries in headquarters buildings in London and Bristol.

Over the four-year period ending March 1990, the energy bill for my Department's office estate (excluding the Property Services Agency and Property Holdings) was reduced by approximately 30 per cent. Whilst figures for the current financial year will not be available until May 1991, my Department expects to achieve further savings of 3 per cent. over 1989-90.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider the application of subsidiarity to the respective powers of local and central Government.

Mr. Key: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 5 December, we are currently conducting a

thorough and fundamental review of the structure and finance of local government. Nothing is ruled out of its scope and nothing ruled in.

Land Designation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received urging a single, national comprehensive scheme for the designation of land which must be farmed or otherwise used in special ways for environmental or conservation purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: None. Government policy on the designation of land is to target areas of particular environmental value or sensitivity and to apply objectives which are relevant to those specific areas. Examples of designations for which my Department is responsible include national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and sites of special scientific interest.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responsible for the designation of environmentally sensitive areas in which farmers are invited to maintain or adopt traditional farming methods in return for annual payments. As announced in the Environment White Paper, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is carrying out a review of environmentally sensitive areas this year.

Marine Resources

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the legislation affecting the planning and use of marine resources; and if he will indicate a time scale.

Mr. Yeo: The environment White Paper announced our intention to review existing legislation to see how this could help meet conservation objectives in the marine environment.

Housing Investment Programme, Warrington

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the housing investment programme allocation for Warrington for *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Warrington borough council's housing investment programme allocations for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are £2·610 million and £2·659 million respectively. For 1990-91, the council received additional resources of £0·4 million through the estate action programme. Decisions on estate action schemes to be funded in 1991-92 will be taken shortly.

Common Land

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to introduce comprehensive common land legislation.

Mr. Trippier: We are reviewing the position in the light of the discussions held in the major interests following the statement I made on 26 July last.

Leaseholders

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take towards allowing leaseholders to buy the freehold of the property which they occupy.

Mr. Yeo: Most leaseholders of houses, but not of flats, already have the right to purchase their freeholds. In addition, a court can order the compulsory acquisition by the leaseholders of flats of the freeholder's interest in certain circumstances where he is failing in his duties. Leaseholders of flats also have the right of first refusal when the freeholder sells his interest. And it is open to leaseholders to seek to purchase the freehold by negotiation.

The possibility of compulsory acquisition of the freehold interest when a commonhold is being established is one of the options considered in the paper on commonhold which the Lord Chancellor has recently issued for consultation. No decision on this has been taken.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take to enable leaseholders to exercise greater managerial control of the property which they occupy.

Mr. Yeo: Under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 residential leaseholders already have considerable rights in respect of the management of their properties. In most cases, they can apply to the courts for the appointment of a manager if the landlord is not managing the block properly. Leaseholders can wholly control the management of their flats by purchasing the freehold and establishing a managing company. In addition, the Lord Chancellor has issued a consultation paper on proposals for commonhold tenure, which provides an alternative management structure. The consultation period ends on 28 February.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to meet the chairman of the National Rivers Authority; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment met Lord Crickhowell on 17 December and intends to meet him again on 5 February. Discussions cover a range of matters relating to the National Rivers Authority's responsibilities for the water environment.

Drinking Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department is gathering about water companies' plans to improve the quality of drinking water, and especially on their planned investment to purify water from dangerous substances.

Mr. Baldry: Public water supplies already comply with the great majority of the standards in the Water Quality Regulations, which are in some respects more stringent than those in the EC drinking water directive; and, even where they do not comply with all the standards, the water

is still safe to drink. Water companies have drawn up programmes costing £1·8 billion over five years in order to improve quality further. These programmes are incorporated in undertakings under section 20 of the Water Act 1989 and in conditions attached to authorisations under regulation 4 of the Water Quality Regulations, and copies of these undertakings and authorisations are in the Library. The drinking water inspectorate makes regular checks to ensure that completion dates are being met. As part of its technical audit of water companies, the inspectorate will examine these programmes in detail, to assess whether they continue to represent the fastest practicable means of achieving compliance with the remaining standards.

Playing Fields

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to discourage the sale of playing fields; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The issue of the disposal of playing fields has been addressed in the draft planning policy guidance note on sport and recreation which my Department issued for public consultation in October last year. In the light of the several hundred responses received, my right hon. Friend will be considering carefully, in consultation with other Departments concerned, what advice should be included in the final guidance.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require county and district councils to indicate those areas within their planning control which are suitable for use in the disposal on land of waste products at present disposed of into coastal waters.

Mr. Yeo: Assessment of the relative merits of alternative means of waste disposal is one of the matters for consideration in the waste disposal plans which authorities are already required to prepare under environmental protection legislation. Amendments to the Planning and Compensation Bill have been tabled in another place which will also require county councils in England to prepare waste disposal development plans for their areas. These plans, which will complement the present waste disposal plans, will set out authorities' land use policies and proposals for the management and disposal of waste.

Fire-resistant Materials

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals to reduce the amount of fire-resistant materials in new buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The consultation paper on proposed amendments to part B, "Safety in Fire", of the Buildings Regulations 1985 includes proposals to reduce periods of fire resistance in some situations, particularly when active fire prevention measures such as sprinklers are also being provided. Comments on these proposals are currently being considered by the fire advisory panel and the Building Regulations Advisory Committee but there are some difficult issues involved and their final advice is unlikely to be available before the summer.

Council Houses

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new local authority homes for rent he expects will be completed during 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities in England are expected to complete about 13,000 houses during 1990-91. Housing associations are becoming the main providers of additional subsidised housing for rent. Public funding for associations through the Housing Corporation will increase from £1·2 billion this year to over £2 billion by 1993-94. Together with their increased ability to draw in private funds, this will permit a sustained increase in output of subsidised housing by associations over the next few years.

Right to Buy

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings each local authority has sold under the right to buy legislation or voluntarily since April 1979; and what percentage of the total local authority stock they represent.

Mr. Yeo: I have placed in the Library a table giving available information on local authority sales up to September 1990. It shows year by year information for each authority since 1985-86 together with cumulative figures since April 1979 and the proportion of their stock sold since April 1979.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has received from English Heritage about the fabric of the former Battersea power station.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* English Heritage has not to date seen the need to offer formal advice to my right hon. Friend on the state of the fabric of Battersea power station, but have kept officials of the Department informed on the progress of their direct dealings with Mr. John Broome and his company. Mr. Broome met the chairman and officials of English Heritage last October and gave them an assurance that the company would be carrying out urgent repairs to certain parts of the building which are particularly at risk, notably the control room and the directors' staircase.

English Heritage officials have been holding monthly meetings on site with the company's agents and have continued to press for these repairs. A start has been made on them, and the company has promised to tackle the remainder very shortly. I gather that Mr. Broome hopes to start work on the leisure complex scheme, for which he holds extant planning and listed bulding consents, in the late spring or early summer, subject to raising finance and concluding negotiations with Wandsworth borough council on ancillary matters.

Ministerial Responsibility

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all those Ministers who have been given a specific responsibility for environmental matters within their respective departmental portfolios.

Mr. Heseltine: *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January, column 274]:* The name of the Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. David Hunt, MP, was inadvertently omitted from the list of Ministers nominated to be responsible for environmental matters within their respective departmental portfolios.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Labelling

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress in establishing a common European standard for the labelling of fats and other nutritional contents of food offered for sale.

Mr. Maclean: The directive on nutrition labelling rules was finally agreed by the Council on 24 September and was published in the Official Journal of 6 October. It lays down the statutory format for giving nutrition information on food labels. It provides for a two-stage approach with energy, protein, carbohydrates and fat in the first group, plus sugar, sodium, saturates and fibre in the second. The giving of information remains voluntary, although when given it must be comprehensive and in the agreed format. The exception to this is that, where a nutrition claim is made, the provision of the information in the agreed format is compulsory.

The first stage of the approach comes into effect from 1 October 1993; the second stage comes into effect two years later. There remain some detailed provisions still to be agreed but I anticipate these issues will be resolved within the initial run-in period. We are disappointed that we did not achieve earlier implementation dates and I know that consumer and health groups will be similarly disappointed. It was, however, not possible to rally majority support in Brussels for an earlier implementation date, and we thought it best to enable this important directive to be agreed without further delay and possible dilution. We shall be making the necessary changes to United Kingdom food labelling legislation, but in the meantime we shall now actively encourage the United Kingdom food industry to provide comprehensive nutrition information to the level of both first and second stages as we do already in the United Kingdom Government guidelines on nutrition labelling of food.

The second directive, giving powers to require selected nutrients to be the subject of compulsory labelling, has not been agreed, but we have ensured that it remains on the table in Brussels. There is a general support amongst a majority of member states for the principles behind this proposal, but it is felt that decisions about compulsory labelling will best be considered after experience has been gained with the voluntary system. Because the science of nutrition is relatively new and ideas and knowledge are still developing, the United Kingdom Government are prepared to go along with the majority view whilst wishing to ensure that the issue of compulsory nutrition labelling does not disappear from view.

Set-aside

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has undertaken or commissioned to determine what savings are made in common agricultural policy commodity market support by farmers forestalling increased production by joining the set-aside scheme; and what are the results.

Mr. Curry: The Department has commissioned an evaluation of the set-aside scheme by Reading university, and we are awaiting the results.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will make it his policy to extend the currently experimental countryside premium top up scheme from the east of England to the whole of the farmed countryside subsequent to his Ministry taking over the running of this scheme; whether he will extend the period of agreement under the scheme on set-aside land; and what plans he has to ensure that any extension of the scheme is sensitive to local environmental conditions;

(2) what advice is available to farmers who wish to manage set-aside in ways compatible with wildlife and nature conservation; and whether he will extend the period of agreement under the existing set-aside scheme for land managed in ways compatible with the environment.

Mr. Curry: A booklet is available under the set-aside scheme which provides farmers with advice on how they may manage their land for the benefit of wildlife, nature conservation and the landscape. Advice is also available from the agricultural development and advisory service and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and, to participants in the countryside premium scheme, from the countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council.

The EC Commission's proposals on agriculture and the environment contain measures which, if adopted, would permit the Agriculture Departments to take over the countryside premium scheme and the payment of set-aside aid for up to 20 years on afforested land or land used for specified ecological purposes. Subject to adoption of these proposals and review of the existing scheme, the intention is to extend the countryside premium scheme to the whole of Great Britain.

If appropriate, the period of set-aside agreements will be reconsidered in light of any changes addopted by the Council of Ministers.

Beef and Sheep Extensification

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has undertaken or commissioned to determine what savings are made in common agricultural policy commodity market support by farmers forestalling increased production by joining the pilot beef and sheep extensification scheme; and what are the results.

Mr. Curry: The Department has commissioned an evaluation of the beef and sheep pilot extensification schemes by Wye college (London university) and the centre for European agricultural studies at Wye, and we are awaiting the results.

Animal Welfare

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to his counterparts *(a)* in the European Economic Community and *(b)* in the United States of

America, Australia and New Zealand, for those countries to bring their animal welfare provision in line with the standards prevailing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: No such representations have been made, except in discussions in the European Community where we are pressing for the uniform application of high welfare standards.

Strategic Food Stocks

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will give details, for each of the years 1979-80 to 1989-90, of losses from the strategic food stocks due to damage and contamination in terms of *(a)* type of food lost, *(b)* quantity of food lost, *(c)* value of food lost and *(d)* cause of loss;

(2) what steps are being taken to prevent losses to strategic food stocks caused by deficiencies in storage arrangement.

Mr. Maclean: Strategic food stocks are kept under regular surveillance by scientific and other staff and remedial action taken as appropriate to ensure the quality and condition is maintained. The average annual losses during the period 1979-80 and 1989-90 of all stocks, including the inevitable deterioration of stocks at the end of their storage life, is less than 0·1 per cent. of the total stock and is valued at less than £100,000 per annum at present-day replacement costs.

Protected Species

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences were issued during each of 1989 and 1990 by him under section 16(3) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and what are the species involved, the method of taking specified and the number of each species actually taken.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested, for England, is as follows:

Year	*Species*	*Licences issued for England*	*Method of taking*	*Number taken*
1989	Badger	6	Cage traps	7
	Glis glis	5	Cage traps	57
1990	Badger	2	Cage traps	0
	Glis glis	4	Cage traps and taking from nests	[1]0

[1] Provisional—One licence return pending.

Foodstuffs Control

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the expenditure implications of the EC directive on the official control of foodstuffs.

Mr. Maclean: An extra £30 million has been added to the revenue support grant from 1991-92 to meet the costs falling to local authorities in Great Britain, as a result of new food legislation. This includes expenditure arising from the EC directive on the official control of foodstuffs.

The money will be distributed among local authorities in the usual way.

Milk

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has made to the recommendation from the Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food, that the consumption of untreated milk is hazardous; and whether he will now take steps to ban the sale of untreated milk in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: Following public consultation in 1989, the Government decided that consumers in England and Wales should continue to be free to choose untreated milk. However, in view of the established health risks associated with this product, new labelling and microbiological testing requirements were introduced in 1990 to ensure that consumers were properly informed and that the risks were minimised. The Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food has recommended that these new measures should be very rigorously enforced and the incidence of food-borne illness associated with the consumption of untreated milk kept closely under review. The Government have accepted this recommendation.

Livestock Extensification Scheme

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors determined his proposal to offer £55 per grazing livestock unit under the livestock extensification scheme; and what information he has of publicly funded bodies which are offering a higher figure per grazing livestock unit.

Mr. Curry: When determining the rate of payment under the beef pilot extensification scheme all relevant factors were considered, including the possible effects on the financial position of those who might participate and the need to achieve value for money. There is no equivalent extensification scheme run by other publicly funded bodies.

Flood Prevention

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the National Rivers Authority to discuss flood prevention schemes.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister meets the chairman of the National Rivers Authority on a regular basis to discuss implementation of the Government's flood defence policy.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Petitions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to simplify the language required to be used under the public petition procedure.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no proposals at present. The marked increase in the number of public petitions written by the public and presented by hon. Members since 1983 suggests that the language currently required does not present a significant obstacle to those wishing to petition the House and hon. Members may consult the Clerk of Public Petitions when necessary. Nevertheless, I would give any proposals made to me careful consideration.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will establish a survey of Members in connection with possible improvements to the public petition procedure.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no present plans to do so. If the Select Committee on Procedure were to examine amendments to the resolutions and practices of the House concerning public petitions, hon. Members could make their views known to the Committee and its recommendations would be given careful consideration.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many public petitions have been submitted to the House in each year for which data are available.

Mr. MacGregor: The number of public petitions presented to the House in each Session since 1785 for which data are available is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1785	298
1786	156
1787	98
1787-88	201
1788-89	127
1801	192
1801-2	158
1802-3	367
1803-4	168
1804-5	141
1811	132
1812	340
1812-13	1,699
1813-14	1,479
1814-15	848
1827	3,635
1828	4,074
1929	4,041
1830	2,522
1830-31	8,961
1831	1,259
1833	10,394
1834	9,407
1835	4,061
1836	5,835
1837	9,822
1837-38	9,516
1839	13,737
1840	18,646
1841	18,648
1842	9,525
1843	33,898
1844	12,462
1845	16,453
1846	8,645
1847	10,527
1847-48	18,504
1849	9,947
1850	16,137
1851	12,021
1852	5,639
1852-53	11,164
1854	10,387
1854-55	10,036
1856	13,867
1857	6,306
1857-58	7,073
1859	6,101
1860	24,279
1861	15,352
1862	10,198
1863	12,583
1864	10,222
1865	8,076
1866	9,691
1867	12,733
1867-68	17,802
1868-69	18,138
1870	19,891
1871	17,500
1872	28,242
1873	21,426
1874	19,107
1875	20,610
1876	18,898
1877	11,805
1878	16,994
1879	12,383
1880	10,022
1881	14,051
1882	19,400
1883	23,304
1884	21,294
1885	10,654
1886	8,173
1887	10,390
1888	12,713
1889	8,317
1890	10,337
1890-91	12,537
1892	6,219
1893-94	33,742
1894	2,245
1895 (I)	9,372
1895 (II)	60
1896	8,412
1987	3,079
1898	5,198
1899 (I)	3,782
1899 (II)	25
1900 (I)	11,126
1900 (II)	28
1901	9,850
1902	5,637
1903	3,170
1904	12,558
1905	1,098
1906	8,893
1907	2,134
1908	10,600
1909	1,811
1910	1,545
1911	236
1912-13	10,221
1913	600
1914	384
1914-16	57
1916	35
1917-18	256
1918	15
1919	121
1920	32
1921 (I)	50
1921 (II)	0
1922 (I)	22
1922 (II)	5
1923	177
1924	19
1924-25	448
1926	344
1927	43
1928	10
1928-29	12
1929-30	23
1930-31	99
1931-32	13
1932-33	695
1933-34	60
1934-35	103
1935-36	6
1936-37	14
1937-38	9
1938-39	16
1939-40	1
1940-41	2

Year	Number
1941-42	6
1942-43	4
1943-44	5
1944-45	2
1945-46	27
1946-47	61
1947-48	9
1948	—
1948-49	5
1950	5
1950-51	18
1951-52	11
1952-53	18
1953-54	24
1954-55	2
1955-56	16
1956-57	58
1957-58	12
1958-59	36
1959-60	8
1960-61	33
1961-62	16
1962-63	19
1963-64	12
1964-65	10
1965-66	6
1966-67	17
1967-68	27
1968-69	16
1969-70	4
1970-71	8
1971-72	21
1972-73	25
1973-74	6
1974	12
1974-75	27
1975-76	58
1976-77	61
1977-78	24
1978-79	10
1979-80	7
1980-81	29
1981-82	27
1982-83	29
1983-84	732
1984-85	1,059
1985-86	516
1986-87	108
1987-88	356
1988-89	227
1989-90	960
1990-91	[1]27

[1] As at 25 January 1991.

Orders in Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the Orders in Council which have been approved in 1990.

Mr. MacGregor: Over 530 orders were approved in Council in 1990, including 133 statutory instruments, 187 orders approving schemes of the Church Commissioners, 86 approving reports of the judicial committee of the Privy Council, 47 approving Acts of the legislatures of the Channel Islands, 21 approving the grant or amendment of royal charters, 18 approving statutes of universities, colleges and schools, 19 making various appointments and 14 relating to the closure of burial grounds.

The orders could be individually listed only at disproportionate cost.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list those who attended the Privy Council on 19 December 1990.

Mr. MacGregor: A list of those who attended the Privy Council meeting on 19 December 1990 was published in the court circular. In addition to Her Majesty the Queen, those present were myself as Lord President of the Council, Mr. David Hunt, Mr. Michael Heseltine, Mr. Peter Brooke, Mr. Malcolm Rifkind, Mrs. Lynda Chalker and Mr. Christopher Patten. Mr. Geoffrey de Deney also attended as Clerk of the Council.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Privy Council will hold its next scheduled meeting.

Mr. MacGregor: The Privy Council is next scheduled to meet in early February.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Poverty

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his Department's latest official figures for the numbers of people living in poverty in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: The Department continues to follow the line of all post-war Administrations in not keeping statistics based on a single definition of poverty. Information on the income and characteristics of people in the lower half of the income distribution are provided in the publication "HBAI a Statistical Analysis 1981-87", produced on a bi-annual basis, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Camden Office (Dispute)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the effect of the current industrial dispute at his Department's office in Camden on homeless claimants; and what steps he has been able to take to alleviate the situation.

Miss Widdecombe: Claims from homeless people are being handled and cleared in the normal way and the office is open to callers as usual.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends making any changes to severe disability premium entitlement for claimants who jointly occupy.

Miss Widdecombe: Subject to other conditions, the severe disability premium is available, in income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit, to claimants who jointly occupy the dwelling with another person where they are co-owners, or are jointly liable to make payments in respect of their occupation of that dwelling, for example, if they are joint tenants. There are no plans to change this policy at the present time.

Local Offices (Staffing)

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) why he no longer takes into account the number of pensioners in an area when fixing the staffing of local Department of Social Security offices;

(2) if he will make it his policy that there will be an immediate increase in staffing at the Department of Social Security local offices to process claims when unemployment rises.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department allocates staffing resources to its local offices according to workload. Local offices record workload, including claims from pensioners and unemployed people each month. Resource managers take account of revised workload forecasts based on those returns when reviewing local office complements.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has regarding the income levels of people who have opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: An examination of a 1 per cent. sample of national insurance records shows that for the year ending 5 April 1989, the latest period for which information is available, the average earnings of those people who had taken out an appropriate personal pension was just under £8,000.

Invalidity Benefit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) of 13 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *501-4*, on the numbers of people receiving invalidity benefit, what factors are responsible for the assessment he has made of the increase in the number of claimants from 1980 to 1990.

Mr. Scott: Recent research has shown a number of reasons which may have influenced the increase in numbers receiving invalidity benefit, but none is conclusive. In the main, increases seem to be due to people staying on invalidity benefit longer. For some illnesses—for example, those of the circulatory system, including heart diseases—life expectancy has increased. In addition, more women have become entitled to receive invalidity benefit because most now pay full rate contributions rather than the married women's reduced rate. Unemployment may also be a factor; when jobs are more scarce people with disabilities or poor general health may find it harder to obtain employment.

The Department is currently planning further research into this question.

Family Credit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing the proposed family credit ceilings in 1991-92 for each of *(a)* a married couple with one child under five years, *(b)* a married couple with two children under 11 years, *(c)* a married couple with two children over 11 years, *(d)* a married couple with three children under 11 years, *(e)* a married couple with three children over 11 years and *(f)* a married couple with two children under 11 years and two children over 11 years.

Mr. Jack: At the new benefit levels proposed for April 1991 the family credit ceiling represented by the highest amount of net earnings and other relevant income a family can have and still qualify for family credit at the minimum payment of 50p will be as follows:

	£
Married couple with one child under 5 years	130·11
Marrried couple with two children under 11	143·96
Married couple with two children over 11 (but under 16)	162·25
Married couple with three children under 11	157·82
Married couple with three children over 11 (but under 16)	185·25
Married couple with two children under 11 and two children over 11 (but under 16)	189·96

SCOTLAND

Local Authorities

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review or amend the system of remuneration for elected members of Scottish local authorities.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Details of a revised scheme of councillors' allowances were announced in May 1990 and draft regulations were issued for consultation in June 1990. Consideration of a number of detailed points which arose has taken longer than expected, but we hope to issue revised draft regulations for final consultation shortly.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last increased the rate of remuneration payable to elected members of Scottish local authorities in the form of attendance allowances and expenses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Increased rates of attendance allowance, financial loss allowance and special responsibility allowance came into effect on 1 September 1990. Rates of travelling and day and night subsistence allowances were increased from 1 January 1991.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the figure for the total number of employees in employment, plus self-employed, in Scotland, for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is shown in the table:

Number of employees in employment and self-employed in Scotland in June of each year from 1979

Year	*Employees in employment*[1] *(thousands)*	*Self-employed*[2] *(thousands)*	*Total employees in employment plus self-employed (thousands)*
1979	2,102	160	2,262
1980	2,082	155	2,237
1981	2,002	149	2,151
1982	1,950	164	2,114
1983	1,899	179	2,078
1984	1,901	185	2,086
1985	1,900	200	2,100
1986	1,879	205	2,084

Year	Employees in employment[1] (thousands)	Self-employed[2] (thousands)	Total employees in employment plus self-employed (thousands)
1987	1,879	194	2,073
1988	1,916	215	2,131
1989	1,959	236	2,195
1990	2,001	247	2,248

Source: Department of Employment.

[1] Estimates of employees in employment for periods after September 1987 are subject to revision on publication of the results of subsequent Censuses of Employment. The 1989 Census of Employment results are expected to become available in Spring 1991.

[2] The estimate for June 1990 is provisional and subject to revision when the results of the 1990 labour force survey become available.

Electronics Industry

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were employed in the electronics industry in Scotland for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lang: The number of people employed in the electronics industry from 1979 is set out in the table. The latest available figures are for 1988.

Electronics employment 1979-88

Year	Employment (thousands)
1979	41·6
1980	42·6
1981	39·6
1982	39·2
1983	42·0
1984	43·9
1985	43·2
1986	41·5
1987	44·0
1988	45·2

Source: Electronics Database Regional Data System.

Women Employees

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of employees in Scotland were women, for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of women employees in employment and number as a proportion of all employees in employment in Scotland in June of each year from 1979

Year	Women employees in employment (thousands)	Proportion of all employees in employment (per cent.)
1979	897	42·7
1980	896	43·0
1981	874	43·7
1982	860	44·1
1983	839	44·2
1984	858	45·1
1985	851	44·8
1986	858	45·7
1987	870	46·3
1988	895	46·7
1989	941	48·0
1990	972	48·6

Source: Department of Employment.

Estimates for periods after September 1987 are subject to revision on publication of the subsequent censuses of employment. The 1989 census of employment results are expected to become available in spring 1991.

Sandeels

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the numbers of O-group, 1-group and older fish in the sandeel catches in International Council for the Exploration of the Seas division VIa in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The estimated numbers are as follows:

Thousands

	O-group	1-group	2+
1986	3,065,660	1,845,060	873,010
1987	700,070	1,196,780	518,460
1988	967,187	258,855	2,352,518
1989	444,595	225,564	1,284,771
1990	411,994	628,767	761,519

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the size of the sandeel catches in ICES division VIa in 1990; and what was the amount of fishing effort directed towards sandeel fishing and the home ports of vessels concerned.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer on 23 November 1990, Vol. 181, col. *243*. The full year figures are now available and the information given on 23 November can be confirmed as reflecting the final position for 1990.

Exports

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the composition of Scottish-manufactured exports, by standard industrial classification, for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available at the level of disaggregation requested.

The information is available at a more aggregated level of classification within the manufacturing industries from 1979 to 1989.

The figures are set out in the table.

Scottish Manufactured Exports (£ million at current prices)

Class and Industry Group	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
21-24 Metal Manufactures	365·8	365·7	300·3	273·7	270·1	208·1	201·3	212·7	182·0	197·2	164·6
25-26 Chemicals	362·6	374·4	343·6	449·6	579·2	540·4	565·6	475·0	700·5	686·3	722·9
31-32 Mechanical Engineering	747·2	702·9	828·7	770·9	772·2	530·5	574·3	540·3	501·0	548·9	589·3

Class and Industry Group	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
33-34, 37 Instrument and Electrical Engineering	355·3	443·4	655·5	733·8	972·1	1,759·9	2,042·0	1,952·4	2,567·2	3,008·3	3,295·9
35-36 Shipbuilding and Vehicles	322·8	397·5	354·0	273·4	334·6	247·2	287·3	231·5	318·0	289·0	229·8
41-42 Food, Drink and Tobacco	770·4	811·5	960·3	977·8	989·9	1,113·8	1,197·2	1,249·0	1,377·7	1,484·8	1,694·2
43-45 Textiles, Leather, Clothing and Footwear	241·9	273·4	317·5	322·0	309·8	281·7	412·7	356·5	412·5	461·4	432·9
46-49 Other Manufacturing	243·5	393·5	265·0	264·6	304·7	270·9	242·0	284·3	334·6	488·7	534·3
Total	3,409·5	3,762·3	4,024·9	4,065·8	4,532·6	4,952·5	5,522·4	5,300·2	6,393·7	7,165·8	7,663·9

Footnote: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
Source: Scottish Council Development and Industry Export Survey.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve rail and road communications to Prestwick airport; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are committed to improving the A77 Ayr road route south of Glasgow in due course when Strathclyde regional council proceeds with improvements to that part of the route for which it is responsible.

Rail links are primarily a matter for British Rail and Strathclyde regional council, but the Government consider that investment in such a link would not be justified at the present time. The matter will, however, be kept under review in the light of trends in the level of passenger traffic using the airport.

Health Targets

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish his health targets for Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The consultation document "Health Education in Scotland: A National Policy Statement", which I issued in October 1990, proposed the following targets for Scotland over the period 1986 to 2000:

A reduction of 25 per cent. in mortality from heart disease in people under age 65;
a reduction of 15 per cent. in mortality from cancer in people under age 65;
a reduction of 30 per cent. in the number of smokers in the age range 12 to 24; and of 20 per cent. in the age range 25 to 65;
a reduction of 20 per cent. in the proportion of the population exceeding the recommended sensible limits of alcohol consumption.

I hope to publish the final version of the policy statement shortly in the light of comments on the consultation document.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish total proposed budget figures for Scottish Enterprise for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Enterprise budget for 1991-92 will be published in the supply estimates.

Cholesterol Tests

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of tests for high cholesterol blood counts carried out, and the corresponding number of such tests requested, for each health board, for the latest available year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of cholesterol tests carried out in each health board for the year ended 31 March 1990 is listed in the table. All such tests requested are carried out.

Cholesterol tests

Health board	Number
Argyll and Clyde	13,301
Ayrshire and Arran	14,255
Borders	3,890
Dumfries and Galloway	4,741
Fife	7,042
Forth Valley	7,545
Grampian	15,087
Greater Glasgow	129,363
Highland	6,705
Lanarkshire	14,596
Lothian	27,234
Orkney	176
Shetland	190
Tayside	13,764
Western Isles	991
SCOTLAND	258,880

Scotland Europa Ltd.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his office has retained advisers to assist in the creation of Scotland Europa Ltd.; and if he will make a statement on his current plans for the future of Scotland Europa Ltd.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Office has retained no advisers in relation to Scotland Europa.

The initiative is under consideration by the Scottish Development Agency. I look forward to seeing its proposals.

Local Health Councils

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of local health councils, following submissions received from Scottish health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Schemes for local health councils have been submitted by all 15 health boards. Those boards representing Ayrshire and Arran, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Grampian, Greater Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Orkney and Shetland have concluded that the interests of the public in the health service in their areas would be best served by single councils. Argyll and Clyde, Highland, Lothian, Tayside and Western Isles health boards have all submitted proposals for multiple councils.

Following very careful consideration my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to approve,

under the provisions of section 7(3) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978, schemes, with modifications as required, to establish single councils for all boards with the exception of Highland, where three councils, based on parliamentary constituency boundaries, and Western Isles with two councils will be permitted. On account of the large population which Greater Glasgow and Lothian health boards served, the councils in these areas will comprise 20 members instead of 15 elsewhere. Letters to this effect are being issued today to all boards.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the cost to Grampian health board for services in connection with preparing business plans for Foresterhill hospital under direct management unit and NHS trust status by Price Waterhouse.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The purpose of the exercise is twofold: to prepare business plans for Foresterhill, but also to serve as a model for business planning in the board and among its other units. The cost to Grampian health board will be of the order of £50,000.

DEFENCE

Medals and Awards

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have received the general service medal or other awards for service in the area of hostilities during the Iran-Iraq war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In recognition of service in the Gulf region, with special regard to the dangers and hardship accompanying that service, Her Majesty the Queen graciously approved the award of the general service medal (1962) with "Gulf" clasp for personnel who served in the Gulf region on board vessels of the Royal Navy and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary between 17 November 1986 and 31 October 1988, and during continuing mine countermeasures (MCM) operations between 1 November 1988 and 28 February 1989.

Qualified personnel who had previously been awarded the General Service Medal (1962) have received the clasp only.

So far 6,316 general service medals and 402 clasps have been awarded to members of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Seventeen medals have been awarded to Army personnel and two to members of the RAF.

In addition, one Queen's gallantry medal and two Queen's commendations for brave conduct have been awarded to naval personnel for explosive ordnance disposal operations following the collision between HMS Southampton and MV Tor Bay in 1988.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any visits to the atomic weapons establishments at *(a)* Aldermaston, *(b)* Burghfield and *(c)* Llanishen by scientific experts from Iraq during the last six years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Gulf War (Press Coverage)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the instructions given to United Kingdom journalists covering the Gulf war, issued by the joint Saudi/United States/United Kingdom information bureau; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All journalists registered with the joint information bureaux are required to sign up to ground rules designed to protect the security and safety of allied troops while allowing reasonable freedom to the press. Copies of the United Kingdom ground rules were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 9 January.

Service Families (Counselling)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make arrangements for families with relatives serving in the Gulf war to receive support via counselling agencies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Where the dependants of service men and women are living at overseas stations, we aim to replicate locally the current United Kingdom Department of Health and local authority provision. We therefore fund the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA) to provide professional primary health care and social work service. Similarly, we fund Relate to provide a marriage guidance counselling service. These agencies will provide counselling to all service families overseas, including those with relatives deployed to the Gulf.

In the United Kingdom, families of our service men and women have access to the normal range of counselling agencies. In addition, SSAFA's voluntary representatives, who have wide experience of supporting the service community, offer advice and help to the wider families of service personnel. At service hospitals worldwide we fund the joint committee of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and British Red Cross to provide low-level professional welfare support to patients and visiting relatives. In planning for the Gulf crisis this service has been expanded, from voluntary resources, to include representation at all hospitals which may expect to receive war casualties.

Prisoners of War, Iraq

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to request the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit British service men held prisoner of war in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The International Committee of the Red Cross has reminded all combatants of their obligations under the Geneva convention 1949 relating to the treatment of prisoners of war. Representatives of the committee have made a preliminary visit to the United Kingdom and we will facilitate further visits in accordance with our obligations under the convention. We have made representations to the committee about British service men believed to be held in Iraq and, in particular, about our concern over reports which suggest that they are not being treated in accordance with the requirements of the convention. We understand that the committee's attempts to obtain access to British (and other allied) prisoners have so far been unsuccessful.

Defence Establishments (Wales)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence research establishments and bases there are in Wales; and what is the purpose of each and the number of people employed in each establishment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are 14 major defence research establishments and bases in Wales. As at 31 December 1990, the total number of service personnel and civilians employed in these establishments and at other locations in the Principality was 5,256 and 5,549 respectively. Of the former, 45 were Royal Navy, 40 Army and 4,805 Royal Air Force.

The Gulf (EC Personnel)

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list information available to him on the total number of active and support personnel each European Community country has committed to the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In addition to the United Kingdom, which has made by far the greatest European contribution to coalition forces, France has deployed naval, ground and air forces; Italy, naval and air forces; and Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Greece and Spain have contributed naval forces; detailed information relating to these deployments is a matter for the Governments concerned. European allies have also provided a wide range of support to the United Kingdom and other countries involved in the multinational force.

The Gulf (Air Sorties)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of sorties made by each category of RAF aircraft in the first seven days of conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During the first seven days of conflict in the Gulf the RAF flew some 650 sorties, of which nearly 300 were offensive and over 180 were air defence. The remainder were carried out on various combat support tasks such as air-to-air refuelling.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of sorties made by the allied forces in the first seven days of conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the first seven days of conflict in the Gulf the allied forces carried out some 15,000 sorties, of which 8,000 were combat sorties.

The Gulf (Combat Losses)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of combat losses from *(a)* the allied forces and *(b)* the United Kingdom forces in the first seven days of conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the first seven days of conflict the allied forces lost a total of 16 aircraft in combat, four of which were RAF.

Operation Granby

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) dated 17 January, *Official Report*, column *547*, on the Gulf crisis, if he will define operating costs as employed in that answer.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Full operating cost comprise two sorts of cost: those of a recurring nature such as the pay of service personnel, the consumption of spares and the repair and maintenance of weapons platforms and equipments; and those one-off costs arising specifically from the operation such as the costs of deployment and of equipment procurement and modification.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the total cost to the United Kingdom of the Gulf crisis; and how much of this represents replacement costs of equipment where payment will be made outside the current financial year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest total full operating cost to date of the United Kingdom's military involvement in the Gulf crisis is estimated to be about £1 billion. This does not include the value of equipment lost and ammunition consumed in operations which is estimated to be well over £100 million. No decisions have yet been taken on the replacement of lost equipment.

Iraq (Military Exports)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military equipment and spares were supplied to Iraq in each year from 1980 to the present date.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been the consistent policy of this and previous Administrations not to comment on such matters. Details of restrictions imposed on military exports to Iraq since 1980 were given in my answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 25 January 1991, *Official Report*, Vol. 184, col. *359*.

Shandwick

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the terms of the contract for public relations given to Mr. Peter Gummer of Shandwick.

Mr. Hurd *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* I have been asked to reply.

No contract has been given to Shandwick. All its advice has been on an informal and unpaid basis.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 31 January 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action he will take further to restrict the sales of substances such as butane which can lead to addiction through abuse; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he has taken and intends to take in the future in order to combat lighter fuel sniffing; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he can provide figures for the number of persons who undertake solvent abuse and lighter fuel sniffing; and what resources he has committed to fighting this.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has the lead in co-ordinating Government policies in this area, which are directed primarily towards education and prevention. It is not possible to estimate the extent of volatile substance misuse with any accuracy as this is essentially a clandestine activity: the numbers are thought to vary greatly over time and place.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's main responsibility so far as the inhalation of lighter fuel is concerned is for the application and enforcement of the criminal law. We supported the passage through Parliament of the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985 which penalises anyone who supplies, or offers to supply, a substance while knowing or having reasonable cause to believe that it is likely to be inhaled by someone under 18 for the purposes of causing intoxication. Figures for the cost of enforcing this law, and of police action in dealing with misusers, are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In view of the very wide range of everyday substances which can be misused, we believe there is little to be gained from further restricting sales. But we shall continue to encourage the voluntary co-operation of retailers in controlling the supply of volatile substances to young people.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many project licence applications were referred to an external assessor by the inspectorate under section 9(1) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, in the years 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statistics on the referral of project licence applications to external assessors are not collected centrally. Applications are referred for formal external assessment on a case-by-case basis where advice is required on specialised aspects of projects, although the number of such referrals is unlikely to be large. In addition, referrals under section 9(1) are made to the Animal Procedures Committee.

Iraqi Service Personnel

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi army, air or navy officers are known to be present to date in the United Kingdom; how many such personnel have been admitted to the United Kingdom in each of the past five years for courses of study; and how many such officers *(a)* have left the United Kingdom voluntarily, *(b)* have been deported, *(c)* are in detention, *(d)* are subject to restriction on their movements and *(e)* are resident without restriction.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No information is recorded on the number of Iraqis admitted to the United Kingdom who were serving members of the Iraqi armed forces. Thirty-six Iraqis, whom we now have reason to believe are serving members of the forces, entered the United Kingdom as students to study at various colleges. Thirty-five of these did so without declaring their military status. One was allowed to make a voluntary departure before confirmation of his status was received and 35 are in military custody. We have no knowledge of the presence in the United Kingdom of any other serving member of the armed forces.

Braille

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what would be the cost of producing form RPF 7B for application to vote by post or proxy in respect of physical disability in braille.

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Refugees

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people with refugee status currently reside in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Around 37,000 people, including sough-east Asian refugees, have been allowed to stay in the United Kingdom as refugees since 1979. Corresponding information for earlier years is not available. Comprehensive records are not kept of those who leave the country, die, obtain British citizenship or otherwise cease to hold refugee status here.

Prostitutes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from police authorities regarding the practice of introducing women in court as known prostitutes.

Mr. John Patten: We have received a letter from the West Yorkshire police authority, forwarded by several hon. and right hon. Members. I have sent the hon. Member a copy of our reply.

Iraqi Detainees

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what comments the International Red Cross has made on the conditions in which Iraqi detainees were held at Her Majesty's prison Pentonville; and what changes the Government are introducing as a result of representations made by the Red Cross.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold: The detainees initially located in Pentonville are now held in Full Sutton prison in

Yorkshire in appropriate living conditions with integral sanitation. This accommodation had been identified before the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross made their visit. Communications between the ICRC and Her Majesty's Government are conducted in confidence and it is not the practice to disclose details.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer, *Official Report*, 18 December 1990, column *104*, if he will list the dates in 1991 on which information relating to poll tax liability orders will be collected and the dates on which it will be published.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* During 1991 information on community charge enforcement proceedings in the magistrates courts will be collected on 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December. The information should be available in the Library within six weeks of the end of each quarter.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require local authorities to apply a multiplier of zero to those public houses occupied by persons as tenants who are also registered to pay poll tax at a separate address.

Mr. Key: Under the new standard charge classes which take effect from 1 April 1991, the multiplier may not exceed one times the personal community charge where unoccupied domestic property shares the same building as a business and as a result would be difficult to let separately. In addition we have now prescribed a new standard community charge class of property whereby the multiplier may not exceed one half if the person subject to that charge is also living in job-related accommodation. Charging authorities will have the discretion to apply either a standard charge multiplier of 0 or one half.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to establish the percentage of payments of community charge and uniform business rates which are still outstanding for each local authority for 1990-91.

Mr. Key: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 23 January 1991, *Official Report*, column *190*.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimate of the cost of administering his proposed community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Portillo: I hope to be in a position to publish an estimate following further discussions between my Department and the local authority associations.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his estimates of the numbers entitled to relief under the community charge reduction scheme using the tax/benefit model based upon the latest family expenditure survey data, breaking the numbers down by size of household and distinguishing between those receiving automatic relief and pensioners or disabled persons who qualify for special relief.

Mr. Portillo: The figures requested are in the table. They are for England only and are based on the family expenditure surveys for 1987, 1988 and 1989. They incorporate a 10 per cent. per annum allowance for depletion of entitlement for charge payers who have moved or died.

Effect of Community Charge Reduction Scheme in 1991-92, by household type

	Number of households (000's)	*Number of adults (000's)*	*CC reductions (£ million)*
All households	8,950	18,530	1,700
One-adult households	1,150	1,150	190
Two-adult households	6,340	12,700	1,220
Larger households	1,470	4,680	290
Of which extra help to:			
Pensioners	350	430	70
Disabled	100	100	20

Landfill Sites

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many landfill sites containing methane have subsequently been the subject of developments.

Mr. Baldry: Government advice since 1978 has been that building development is inadvisable on former landfill sites known to be emitting methane. Figures for developments on former landfills are not collected centrally. However, since 1988 local planning authorities have been required to consult waste disposal authorities on applications for development within 250 m of landfills.

Maps

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that Ordnance Survey continues to show the location of Forestry Commission land on its Landranger and Pathfinder maps.

Mr. Baldry: The chief executive will write to the hon. Member.

Refuse-derived Fuel

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has executive power to conclude regulations governing the burning of refuse-derived fuel without reference of final decisions to him.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution does not have power to make regulations. Regulations governing the burning of refuse-derived fuel are being prepared by the Department as part of the regulations to implement the EC directive on municipal waste incineration. They will be subject to parliamentary approval in the usual way.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Members

for Thurrock and for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), *Official Report*, column *87*, 21 January, whether Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will consider the effects of disproportionate costs on small-scale users of refuse-derived fuel when drafting integrated pollution control regulations.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is not drafting regulations. When drafting the guidance to cover the burning of refuse-derived fuel Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will consult widely the relevant sectors of industry and will take into account the costs to users.

First-time Buyers

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of schemes to assist first-time buyers with below-market value homes *(a)* in the European Community and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Department is aware of several schemes for assisting house purchase deployed in European Community countries. Most involve assistance towards loan repayments; we are not aware of any schemes in which property can be purchased at less than full market value. By contrast, in the United Kingdom the Government have offered wider forms of assistance of which right to buy, shared ownership, homesteading and licensed development schemes involve substantial discounts to first-time buyers.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of the people who bought homes for the first time in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Yeo: The number of first-time buyers in Great Britain is estimated at 630,000 in 1987, 770,000 in 1988 and 640,000 in 1989. Figures for the whole of 1990 are not yet available, but in the first three quarters of 1990 it is estimated that there were some 450,000 first-time buyers.

Spending Assessments

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the standard spending assessments for *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92 for each of the boroughs in Greater London in respect of (i) education and (ii) social services.

Mr. Key: The figures requested are shown in the table.

The 1990-91 and 1991-92 Standard Spending Assessments for Education and Social Services and for each borough in Greater London in £ million.

£ million

Authority	*1990-91 Education SSA*	*1991-92 Education SSA*	*1990-91 Social Services SSA*	*1991-92 Social Services SSA*
City of London	0·824	0·814	0·396	0·500
Camden	52·762	61·062	33·809	41·584
Greenwich	82·257	98·038	25·451	32·165
Hackney	91·828	106·800	45·074	55·504
Hammersmith and Fulham	45·602	51·587	32·215	38·937
Islington	64·211	76·597	34·146	43·015
Kensington and Chelsea	29·783	34·857	23·497	30·155
Lambeth	105·484	124·829	57·262	71·209
Lewisham	86·010	102·429	35·035	43·806
Southwark	85·168	102·708	40·813	51·017
Tower Hamlets	91·292	112·110	32·414	41·015
Wandsworth	84·149	97·374	43·829	54·869
Westminster	44·456	50·044	34·161	43·073
Barking and Dagenham	48·338	56·906	14·943	18·288
Barnet	88·054	104·134	23·237	29·204
Bexley	67·800	80·499	13·412	16·715
Brent	108·138	124·847	35·191	42·506
Bromley	79·378	92·214	20·353	25·580
Croydon	102·781	120·350	27·523	34·025
Ealing	100·586	119·871	30·872	37·725
Enfield	88·524	105·597	21·500	26·679
Haringey	79·308	93·711	32·528	40·378
Harrow	65·387	75·400	13·080	15·983
Havering	71·015	84·563	13·710	17·183
Hillingdon	69·110	82·574	16·047	20·284
Hounslow	68·774	82·443	18·643	23·032
Kingston-upon-Thames	36·275	43·282	10·989	13·011
Merton	47·164	54·705	15·345	18·567
Newham	98·510	118·059	31·636	38·858
Redbridge	71·225	85·178	17·082	21·655
Richmond-upon-Thames	35·997	41·859	13·677	17·113
Sutton	47·633	56·689	12·233	15·251
Waltham Forest	81·744	96·671	27·274	33·156

Pollution Control (Appeals)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the appeals under section 10 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 currently under consideration, showing the dates when they were first lodged; how many decisions have been issued since 30 August 1990; and whether he has any proposals for speeding the process.

Mr. Trippier: The table lists the appeals currently under consideration showing the dates they were first lodged. Three decisions have been issued since 30 August 1990. Following internal reorganisation of staff to allow greater priority to be given to these appeals in future, we are now in the process of hiring consultants to provide additional technical support.

Empire Brickworks, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	1 June 1982
Seal Sands Terminal, Seal Sands, Cleveland	26 June 1984
Empire Brickworks 51, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	8 September 1986
Empire Brickworks 231, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	8 September 1986
Empire Brickworks 323, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	8 September 1986
Empire Brickworks 324, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	8 September 1986
Aveley Clay Pit 2 & 3, Sandy Lane, Aveley, Essex	10 July 1987
Old Railway Cutting, Chesterfield Road, Bolsover, Derbyshire	7 December 1987
Unit 3 Hartlepool, Sandgate Industrial Estate, Cleveland	7 December 1987
Springwell Hill, Nether Handley, Sheffield	9 December 1987
Norwood Industrial Estate, Rotherham Road, Killamarsh, Sheffield	3 February 1988
Munnery's Copse, Worthing, West Sussex	27 June 1988
Springwell Hill (2), Nether Handley, Sheffield	1 August 1988
Redbournbury Plant, St. Albans, Hertfordshire	24 November 1988
Butterley Hole, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	6 February 1989
Bakers Hole, Swanscombe, Kent	8 March 1989
Martin Earles No. 1, Cuxton, Kent	8 March 1989
Martin Earles Pit No. 2, Cuxton, Kent	8 March 1989
140 Moss Lane, Macclesfield, Cheshire	13 March 1989
Mucking Wharf, Mucking, Essex	16 May 1989
Offham Quarry, Teston Road, Offham, Kent	19 June 1989
Stangate Quarry, Borough Green, Kent	19 June 1989
Pluckley Brickworks, Chambers Green, Pluckley, Kent	29 June 1989
Vineyard Chalkpit, Rainham, Kent	29 June 1989
Stone Pits 5 & 6, Stone, Dartford, Kent	29 June 1989
Stone 1 & Atlas Stone, Stone, Dartford, Kent	29 June 1989
Barnett & Beddows, Stubbers Green Road, Aldridge, Walsall	6 September 1989
Rough Park Quarry, Mill Lane, Upholland, Lancashire	9 October 1989
Lumm Farm, Lumb Lane, Littlemoss, Droylesden, Greater Manchester	20 October 1989
Halfhead Farm, Shallowford, Stone, Staffordshire	17 November 1989
Bell Terminal, Grangetown, Middlesbrough, Cleveland	20 November 1989
Jolly Farmer Sand Pit, Guildford Road, Runfold, Surrey	21 November 1989
Farnham Sandpit, Alton Road, Farnham, Surrey	8 December 1989
Birch Coppice, Coppice Side, Brownhills, Walsall	8 January 1990
Castner Kellnersite, Runcorn	11 January 1990
Rocksavage Site, Runcorn	11 January 1990
Former Branstons Wharf, Lea Road, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	24 January 1990
Hoddesdonbury, Cock Lane, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire	5 February 1990
Ex Y.E.B. Sub-station, Parkwood Road, Neepsend, Sheffield	5 February 1990
600B Hammondstreet Road, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire	7 February 1990
Tunnel Approach Transfer Station, St. Leonard's Wharf, London	8 March 1990
Sansbury Farm, Knotts Lane, Colne, Lancashire	19 March 1990
Griff Quarry No. 2, Coventry Road, Nuneaton, Warwickshire	30 March 1990
Parkwood Road Coal Yard, Parkwood Road, Neepsend, Sheffield	12 April 1990
Farnham Sandpit, Alton Road, Farnham, Surrey	10 May 1990
Jessamy Road, Weybridge, Surrey	15 May 1990
Wharfdale Depot, Westbourne, Bournemouth, Dorset	1 June 1990
Colton Hall Farm, Blithbury Road, Colton, Rugeley, Staffordshire	8 June 1990
Greengate, Chadderton, Oldham, Greater Manchester	12 June 1990
Beswick Tip, Beswick, Humberside	21 June 1990
Hill Top Colliery A & B, Sharnyford, Lancashire (LANCS)	6 July 1990
Hill Top Colliery C & D, Sharnyford, Lancashire (WYWM)	6 July 1990
Monk's Tip, Tividale, Sandwell	13 July 1990
Grange Farm, Buckles Lane, South Ockenden, Essex	18 July 1990
Stillington Landfill Site, Stockton on Tees, Cleveland	27 July 1990
Nea Road, Hamer Warren, Somerley, Ringwood, Hampshire	8 August 1990
Greengate, Chadderton, Oldham No. 2	15 August 1990
Broadwater Plant Site, Nr. Denham, Hillingdon	31 August 1990
Hillhouse Works, Thornton Cleveleys, Blackpool, Lancashire	30 October 1990
Cleanaway Incineration Plant, Bridges Road, Ellesmere Port	5 November 1990
21 Ham Moor Lane, Weybridge, Surrey	8 November 1990
The Old Rectory, Lorton Lane, Broadway, Weymouth, Dorset	19 November 1990
West Road, Pogmoor, Barnsley, South Yorkshire	19 November 1990
Stephenson Industrial Estate, Hartlepool, Cleveland	22 November 1990
Albright & Wilson Works, Smoke Lane, Avonmouth, Bristol, Avon	3 December 1990
Hillary Road/Wilden Lane, Stourport, Hereford and Worcester	6 December 1990
Ross Mills, Rodley, Leeds	11 December 1990
Wharf Lane, Chasetown, Nr. Walsall, Staffordshire	17 December 1990
Bedwell . Avenue, Essendon, Hatfield, Hertfordshire	20 December 1990
Middlefield Ware Quarry, Westmill Road, Hertfordshirre	27 December 1990
Ashburton Grove, Islington, London	3 January 1991
Stowford Quarry, Okehampton, Devon	9 January 1991
Bretts Farm, Marshfoot Road, Grays, Essex	18 January 1991
Stone Quarry, Crooke Burnell, North Tawton, Devon	18 January 1991

Waste Regulation (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on the arrangements for waste regulation in South Yorkshire; what action he has taken on the report; and when he intends to publish it.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution submitted its report to the Secretary of State on 12 December 1990. Copies have been placed in the Library, and are available from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on request. I have concluded on the basis of this report that unless the four district councils in South

Yorkshire are able to agree improved joint arrangements which meet Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's concerns, my right hon. Friend will have no alternative but to set up a statutory waste regulation authority for the area. Officials have written to the councils concerned informing them of these views, and the action we propose to take.

Titnore Lane Landfill Site

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when any parties to the planning appeal regarding the Titnore lane landfill site were informed of the proposed date for the appeal to be heard; on what date the county council was informed; and what representations he has received about the time necessary for all parties to prepare their case adequately.

Sir George Young: The parties, including West Sussex county council, were notified formally on 18 January that this inquiry will open on 16 April—the first date on which a suitably qualified inspector is available to take it. An informal indication of an April inquiry was given, inadvertently, to the appellants' agents during a telephone conversation in December. The county council wanted more time in which to prepare its case. However, the council's initial written statement on the appeal proposal was lodged on 19 December, and three months' notice of the inquiry is considered reasonable. Under the inquiries procedure rules this inquiry should have opened not later than 14 March, but that was not practicable.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions have been made for the long-term management or disposal of radioactive wastes arising from the decommissioning of the Windscale piles Nos. 1 and 2, B6 and B16, at Sellafield; and if the costs are rechargeable to any Government Department.

Mr. Trippier: Low-level waste arising from decommissioning of the Windscale piles is likely to be disposed of at the Drigg disposal site. Intermediate-level waste will be disposed of in United Kingdom Nirex deep repository. I understand that the costs of this work will be met by the Ministry of Defence and the Atomic Energy Authority.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the leaders of local authorities to discuss the housing sector.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), the then Minister for Housing and Construction, met representatives of the local authority associations at the Housing Consultative Council on 19 November. The council normally meets twice a year.

Security

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he has issued guidance to local authorities in England and Wales about increased security in public buildings such as libraries;

(2) whether he has issued guidance to local authorities concerning security of local authority employees with regard to possible terrorist action.

Mr. Heseltine: It is the duty of everybody in the country today to be vigilant. Local authorities are well aware of their responsibilities in this matter and of the precautions which they should be taking.

Urban Development

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a policy and quantitative evaluation of the work of each urban development corporation covering the period of their existence.

Mr. Portillo: Arrangements are in hand for an exercise in 1991-92 to establish baseline data for future evaluation of UDCs and Birmingham Heartlands.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the urban development corporations which have areas of land in their charge which have yet to show some development taking place on land acquired.

Mr. Key: The UDCs acquire, reclaim and dispose of land for development as one means of securing the regeneration of their areas. All UDCs currently hold some land which is awaiting development.

The Gulf

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has conducted into the possibility of smoke pollution from the Gulf reaching the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: A note by the Meteorological Office on possible environmental consequences of burning oil wells in Kuwait was placed in the Library of the House on 17 January by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. It contains no suggestion that smoke from Gulf oil fires would reach the United Kingdom. The Meteorological Office is continuing to refine its assessment, in consultation with the Department.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what preparations were made before 28 January by his Department to deal with any major environmental consequences of the conflict in the Gulf; on which dates each of these preparations was made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Job Creation

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the projected number of jobs to be created by *(a)* the London Docklands development corporation and *(b)* the Merseyside development corporation.

Mr. Portillo: No numbers were projected when these development corporations were set up. To March 1990, there had been a net gain of 29,000 permanent jobs in the London Docklands area and 4,200 in Merseyside's area.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local people have secured jobs in

the area of *(a)* London Docklands development area and *(b)* Merseyside development corporation since their introduction.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not collected by Merseyside nor on a regular basis by London Docklands. However, a London Docklands survey in 1987 indicated that out of 42,000 then employed in the urban development area about a third were residents of the three dockland boroughs.

Regional Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a table of expenditure on the regional offices of Government Ministries in 1989-90, broken down by Ministry and separating out the cost of running the regional office from the funding programmes it discharges and showing the expenditure on, and of, each regional office separately.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 22 January 1991]:* The estimated costs of running each regional office of the Department of the Environment in 1989-90 are shown in table 1. Information on the Department's programme expenditure is collected by standard economic planning region; the breakdown for 1989-90 is shown in table 2. Both tables exclude the Property Services Agency. Information on other Departments' regional offices is not held by my Department.

Table 1

Regional office	*1989-90 administration expenditure £ million*
London	5·2
South East	3·8
Eastern	3·1
South West	2·7
West Midlands	4·4
East Midlands	3·9
North West	6·8
Merseyside Task Force	2·2
Yorkshire and Humberside	4·7
Northern	4·2

Table 2

Department of the Environment/spending in England by standard economic planning regions in 1989-90 (£M)

Standard economic planning regions	*Rate support grant*	*Other service basic capital allocations to LAs*	*Community charge preparation allocations to LAs*	*Urban development corporations*	*Urban programme*	*Housing subsidy paid to local authorities*	*Housing investment programme allocations to local authorities*
South east	2,849	60·9	51·5	255·8	50·7	516·7	452·2
South West	785	17·6	13·1	5·0	2·5	2·9	62·3
East Anglia	285	8·4	5·7	—	—	0·3	26·4
West Midlands	1,053	17·1	13·9	3·8	41·0	8·8	127·8
East Midlands	762	12·9	11·1	—	11·4	10·0	60·7
North West	1,695	20·4	17·2	47·3	73·5	29·7	186·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,306	19·5	13·3	18·3	27·2	−0·2	106·3
Northern Region	843	11·2	8·6	17·8	41·7	16·2	72·5

The expenditure on urban programme includes previously with DES, DH and DTp. The totals also include LAs contribution (25 per cent.).

NATIONAL FINANCE

Interest Rates

12. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Bank base rates are 14 per cent.

Imports

13. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how imports have performed over the latest three months for which figures are available.

16. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how imports have performed over the latest three months for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: In the fourth quarter of 1990 the volume of imports—less oil and erratics—fell by 1 per cent. on the previous quarter. Volumes in the year as a whole rose by only 1 per cent. compared with export growth of 7½ per cent.

Income Tax

14. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the impact on income from income tax of the reduction of the higher rates of that tax.

Mr. Maude: Since 1979, the top rate of income tax has been reduced from 83 to 40 per cent., and nine separate higher rate bands have been reduced to a single rate. Over that period, receipts from higher rate tax have increased two and a half times in real terms.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to reduce the standard rate of tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Manufacturing Exports

15. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on the export performance of United Kingdom manufacturers during 1990.

Mr. Mellor: The volume of manufactured exports rose by 8 per cent. in 1990 after a 10½ per cent. rise in 1989. The United Kingdom share of world trade in manufactures rose for the second successive year.

Taxation

17. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his current estimate of the percentage of central Government revenue raised from income tax in each of the main OECD countries.

Mr. Maude: The latest estimates by the OECD show that in the United Kingdom the share of taxes on personal income in total tax and social security revenues in 1988 was equal to the EC average.

24. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has of the changing impact of taxes, including income tax, indirect taxes, insurance and local taxes and charges, on 18-year-olds and 21-year-olds between 1 January 1979 and 1 January 1991 on average earnings and incomes for those age groups.

Mr. Maude: A young person in employment aged between 18 and 20 paid on average 25 per cent. of gross earnings in income tax and national insurance contributions in 1978-79; and will pay 22 per cent. in 1990-91. Information on the effects of other taxes is not available.

Public Expenditure

19. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Trades Union Congress about the public spending planning total for 1991-92.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Investment

20. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest OECD estimates for investment growth in the United Kingdom and Germany in 1990.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Latest OECD estimates for total fixed investment in 1990, published in the December "Economic Outlook" and, partly based on forecasts, show a fall of 1·3 per cent. in the United Kingdom and a rise of 8·2 per cent. in western Germany.

Manufacturing Output

21. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is manufacturing output today; and what was the comparable figure in spring 1979.

Mr. Mellor: Manufacturing output data are published in index form, with the average for 1985 equal to 100. In the three months to November manufacturing output averaged 116·2. In the second quarter of 1979 the index was 108·7.

Savings

22. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates for the savings ratio.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce).

Inflation

23. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the prospects for inflation.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: RPI inflation fell from 10·9 per cent. in October to 9·3 per cent. in December. This is consistent with the autumn statement forecast which pointed to a fall to 5½ per cent. by the fourth quarter of this year.

Exports

25. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of export growth over the latest three months for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: In the fourth quarter of 1990 United Kingdom export volumes—excluding oil and erratics—rose 2 per cent. on the previous quarter and were 4 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Child Poverty

26. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group to discuss the effects of the Government's policies on child poverty.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend met representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group last June and has no plans to do so again in the near future.

Tax-exempt Savings

27. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many building societies and banks are offering a TESSA.

Mr. Maude: A total of 150 so far, including the great majority of high street banks and building societies.

London Weighting

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the amount which has been spent in the last two years as London weighting for civil servants represents increases to the salaries of lower-paid civil servants.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: London weighting has not been increased over the last two years. However, of the £87 million spent enhancing London pay in other ways during the period approximately 41 per cent. has been paid to staff with salary maxima below £10,000.

New Coins

Mr. Speller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consult all interests, including vending machine operators, shops and the general public, before introducing any new coinage or notes.

Mr. Maples: It is standard practice for the royal mint to consult interested parties before the introduction of any new coins, and it will continue to do so. Before the new 5p coin was introduced into circulation in June 1990, the royal mint undertook extensive consultations with interested parties and the general public. In addition vending companies were given test coins and two and a half years' notice to plan for the change.

The Bank of England is responsible for note issue matters. It also carries out extensive consultations prior to new notes being issued. It consults, in particular, organisations representing the blind, and also makes samples of the new notes available to banks, building societies, and note-handling machine manufacturers well in advance of issue.

"Next Steps" Agencies

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards establishing Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue as "next steps" agencies.

Mr. Maude: Following the announcement my predecessor made on 25 July 1990 at c.*239-42* on steps to be taken to ensure both Departments operated fully on "next steps" lines I intend to make further announcements in respect of both Departments shortly.

Gulf War

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the total cost of British involvement in the Gulf has been calculated.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* The basis for the calculations of the cost of United Kingdom military operations in the Gulf was explained in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's letter of 21 January to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), a copy of which is in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disabled Access

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) what plans he has for the improvement of disabled access in the House;

(2) when a review of disabled access in the House was last made.

Mr. MacGregor: The all-party disablement group carried out a review and submitted proposals to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee in May 1981 to improve access for disabled people. As I stated in my reply of 21 January to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), the Parliamentary Works Officer is carrying out feasibility studies into a number of further proposals that were received in December 1990 from the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), chairman of the all-party disablement group. Once they have been completed, the results of these studies will be forwarded to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee for its consideration.

Members' Accommodation

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Lord President of the Council what investigations have been carried out to try to identify extra office accommodation for hon. Members pending the completion of the new office buildings.

Mr. MacGregor: The results of a comprehensive space audit of the parliamentary estate will be presented to the Services Committee shortly. They are expected to confirm that there is little scope for providing extra accommodation for Members prior to the opening of phase I of the new parliamentary building later this year. About 100 extra Members' offices will be provided at that time. Planning is under way for phase 2 of the project, with a view to achieving the Services Committee's objective that by the time the new building is complete,

"every Member who wants a room of his or her own should have one".

In addition, urgent consideration is being given to the possibility of acquiring alternative accommodation within a reasonable distance of the Chamber for Members and staff currently occupying buildings, such as St. Stephen's house, which it is proposed to redevelop as part of phase 2. The Services Committee expects to report to the House on these matters shortly.

Statues

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Lord President of the Council for what reason the statue of Joseph Chamberlain in the Members' Lobby of the House was replaced with one of Benjamin Disraeli during the Christmas recess; if he will outline the total cost of such a move; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The statues were moved following a resolution of the Advisory Committee on Works of Art in the House of Commons. The cost of the work was some £3,000.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

The Gulf

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the contribution made by EC members to the Gulf crisis in terms of cash and resources; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The majority of the European Community member states have already contributed to the multinational force in the Gulf, whether with military forces, logistical, medical, financial or other forms of assistance. We are seeking additional contributions to our costs from a number of countries, including EC members. The Community and its member states are also providing economic assistance to those countries most directly affected economically by the crisis, as well as providing substantial humanitarian assistance to alleviate the refugee problem in the region.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what *(a)* governmental and *(b)* international activity, involving Her Majesty's Government, took place before 28 January to prepare the specialist method of responding to any environmental crisis in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government have responded promptly and positively to requests from the Saudi Arabian Government for expert advice and assistance following the deliberate pollution of the Gulf by Saddam Hussein. We are also in touch with other states in the region. Since the risk of conflict arose, the Government have been fully conscious of a number of possible environmental risks arising from it and has maintained close contact with the allies on all matters connected with it. It is for the Gulf states affected, drawing on the expertise on offer from the United Kingdom and the international community, to lead the response to the environmental damage that Iraq is inflicting on the region.

Gas Masks (Palestinians)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the Israeli Prime Minister concerning the provision of gas masks to the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

The Prime Minister: None. On 14 January the Israeli High Court ordered the army to distribute its stock of masks to Palestinians along the green line between Israel and the occupied territories immediately, and to obtain more for the remaining residents of the west bank and Gaza. The distribution has begun. We welcome this decision.

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Madel: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the latest reports of the pay review bodies.

The Prime Minister: The 1991 reports of the review bodies on the pay of the armed forces, the doctors and dentists, the professions allied to medicine, nursing staff, midwives and health visitors, and of the Top Salaries Review Body have been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office. The Government are grateful to the members of the review bodies for the time and care which they have put into the preparation of the reports. The table shows the increases recommended by the review bodies for each group, and their cost.

	Pay bill increase Per cent.	*Range of increases in 1991-92 Per cent.*	*United Kingdom public expenditure cost*[1] *£ million*
Armed forces	12·2	[2]11·2-18·0	536
Doctors and dentists	10·2	9·5-12·7	454
Professions allied to medicine	10·8	10·0-14·2	74
Nursing staff, midwives and health visitors	9·7	[3]9·5-11·0	696
Top salaries	9·6	[4]9·5-12·1	10

[1] These figures are higher than those in the Review Bodies' reports, which do not cover the full public expenditure costs.

[2] University cadets will receive lower increases, down to 7·8 per cent. for first year students. A few Captains RN may receive up to 20·1 per cent. as a result of changes to submarine and bonus payments.

[3] A small number of Grade B staff and staff nursery nurses will receive rises of 14·1 per cent. or 14·2 per cent., and some nurses in receipt of the geriatric lead will receive 9·3 per cent.

[4] The 12·1 per cent. is for 2 star officers only; all others receive 9·5 per cent.

The Government accept the recommendations of the review bodies and will be implementing them in full. All the proposed improvements in pay structures, designed to assist in recruiting, retaining and motivating staff, are accepted, indeed welcomed. But the overall cost of the pay packages proposed by the review bodies is high. The cost exceeds the provision available in Departments' spending plans for next year at a time when public expenditure is under pressure as a result of events in the Gulf.

Accordingly, given the size of the recommended increases as well as wider economic considerations, it will be necessary to stage payment of the review bodies' awards, except to the armed forces. When many of our armed forces are on active service, we have concluded it would not be appropriate to ask them to wait for their full pay award. For all other groups the staging will involve an increase of at least 7·5 per cent. from 1 April with the balance paid from 1 December. In consequence the full awards for all groups will be in payment before the end of this year.

The cost of implementing the recommendations on this basis will be met from within the public expenditure planning totals published in the autumn statement. The Government recognise that the cost of the health service awards could not be met in full from present health service provision without adversely affecting services to patients. The Government will therefore provide an extra £250 million from the reserve for next year, bringing the total increase in the resources available for the national health services between 1990-91 and 1991-92 to £3·4 billion. The full increase in costs for the armed forces over the provision previously made in the defence budget will also be met from the reserve: an allocation of £70 million will be made from the reserve for this purpose.

The specific application of this approach to the respective groups will be as follows.

The increases recommended by the review body on the armed forces will be paid in full from 1 April 1991. The increase in the 'x' factor, which reflects the special demands of service life, will be larger for women than for men and will remove all pay distinctions between them.

The Government have decided to accept the recommendations of the review body on doctors and dentists, but to stage their implementation so that 7·5 per cent. is paid in all cases from 1 April and the remainder of the increases, ranging from 2 per cent. to 5·2 per cent. for different categories, from 1 December. Increased expenses for general medical practitioners, which are a necessary part of the cost of running a practice, will be paid in full from 1 April.

Similarly, for nursing staff, midwives and health visitors, the Government accept the recommendations of the review body, but their implementation will be staged so that all staff will receive at least 7·5 per cent. from 1 April and the remaining 2 per cent. from 1 December. Lower-paid nursing staff, for whom the review body has recommended higher increases, will receive all but 2 per cent. from 1 April with the balance paid from 1 December.

The Government have also decided to accept the recommendations of the review body on professions allied to medicine, but to stage their implementation so that 7·5 per cent. is paid to all from 1 April and the remaining pay increases and other additional payments are paid from 1 December.

Groups covered by the Top Salaries Review Body will receive 7·5 per cent. from 1 April, with the remainder from

1 December. However, two-star military officers, for whom higher increases were recommended, will receive all but 2 per cent. from 1 April with the balance paid from 1 December. The new system of performance-related pay for civil servants, which the Top Salaries Review Body recommended in their report last year, will be implemented from 1 April 1991.

The pay rates and scales resulting from the decisions will be promulgated as soon as possible for the groups concerned. Pensions will follow the rates of salary in payment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will give the number and list the companies in which he has appointed inspectors from within or outside his Department under the Companies Act 1985 since 1979; and if he will give the number of those inspectors' reports which he has published.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 8 January 1990, *Official Report*, columns *519-24*. Since that date, inspectors have been appointed in the following cases:

1. BOM Holdings plc.
2. Atlantic Computers plc.
3. Atlantic Computer Systems plc.
4. Astra Holdings plc.
5. London United Investments plc.
6. Norton Group plc.

Seventeen reports have been published in relation to inspections begun since 1979.

Questions

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central of 23 January, *Official Report*, column 329, what has been the cost of the 436 questions asked by the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on accountancy during the last two years.

Mr. Redwood: Detailed information on the cost of providing each answer is not recorded, but the total cost to my Department has probably been between £30,000 and £60,000 in the period since 1 December 1989.

Environmental Sensor Technologies

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the laboratory of the Government chemist received the report on environmental sensor technologies commissioned by his Department from Robert Bogue and Partners; to whom and through what outlets the report will be made available; and what was the cost of the consultancy with Robert Bogue and Partners for the preparation of the report.

Mr. Leigh: The report on environmental sensor technologies was received by the laboratory of the Government chemist on 3 September 1990. The findings of the consultancy were presented at an open seminar held in London on 28 November 1990. Copies of a short report which summarises the findings of the consultancy are available free on request from the laboratory of the Government chemist. A more detailed report can be purchased from the laboratory of the Government chemist. The cost of the consultancy is commercial-in-confidence information.

Iraq

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the value of export credits granted to Iraq in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 17 October 1990, *Official Report*, column *837*.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ministerial visits have been made by his Department to Iraq since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: Eight.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the value of export and import trade with Iraq expressed at constant prices in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: These figures from 1979 to 1988 are available from the "Annual Abstract of Statistics"—1990 Edition, tables 12.5 and 12.6. From 1989 to date, the figures are available from the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" tables 15.5 and 15.6.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much has been spent by his Department on activities arising from trade fairs in Iraq since 1979;

(2) if he will give details of financial and technical support supplied to visiting trade delegations from the United Kingdom to Iraq in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of Department of Trade and Industry programme expenditure on financial support for trade delegations is not available for the years 1979-80 to 1983-84. Net expenditure on events opening in subsequent years, with that on trade fairs identified separately, is set out in the table:

Assistance provided under the outward and inward trade missions, trade fairs and seminars scheme

Year	*£ thousands*	*Of which trade fairs £ thousands*
1984-85	145·6	135·3
1985-86	122·6	108·6
1986-87	158·7	149·7
1987-88	60·3	47·9
1988-89	238·6	221·8
1989-90	559·6	483·6
1990-91	4	—

These delegations received the additional support normally provided from Her Majesty's Government.

Walter Somers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what companies were mentioned in documents forwarded to the Department by Walter Somers and

Forgemasters Engineering Ltd. in connection with the inquiries made of the export licensing division since 1988; and in what capacity they were mentioned.

Mr. Lilley: It is not the practice to reveal details of individual licensing applications.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries the export licensing division has received since the beginning of 1988 from (1) Walter Somers and (2) Forgemasters Engineering Ltd.; what products the inquiries concerned; which require export licences; and which were deemed to have a potential military application.

Mr. Lilley: It is not the practice to reveal details of individual licensing inquiries.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Cambodia

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which United Nations agencies have received funding from Her Majesty's Government for work in Cambodia; if the £1·25 million announced to support United Nations work in Cambodia has been fully utilised by United Nations agencies; and if more funds will be made available to them.

Mrs. Chalker: Since the Government reviewed their policy towards Cambodia in November 1989 the following allocations have been made to United Nations agencies:

1989-90

UNICEF—£0·25 million for immunisation, water supply and sanitation, pre-primary education and textbook production.

1990-91

UNICEF—£0·5 million for health, nutrition, water and sanitation.

World Health Organisation—£0·2 million anti-malaria programme.

World Food Programme—£0·3 million for rice in support of UNICEF's well and pond digging programme.

These funds are being used by the agencies to support their current programmes in Cambodia. We are monitoring progress and we are prepared in due course to consider providing further support for their work.

Refugee Relief

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which nations have been refused refugee relief in the last three years.

Mrs. Chalker: None.

International Organisations (Subscriptions)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost of United Kingdom subscriptions to international organisations in each of the last five years at constant prices.

Mrs. Chalker: The total cost to the United Kingdom aid programme of contributions and subscriptions to international organisations in each of the last five years at constant 1989 prices was as follows:

	£ million
1985	612
1986	611
1987	596
1988	702
1989	674

Foreign Investment Advisory Service

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of funding of the foreign investment advisory service; and how many staff it has.

Mrs. Chalker: The foreign investment advisory service has received funding as follows.

Period	*US$*
1 July 1988 to 30 June 1989 (actual)	2,182,000
1 July 1989 to 30 June 1990 (estimated)	3,360,000
1 July 1990 to 30 June 1991 (projected)	3,946,000

In the fiscal year ending 30 June 1990 FIAS employed the equivalent of eight staff years and seven consultant years.

Cuba

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the purposes for which the United Kingdom has given aid to Cuba since 1987.

Mrs. Chalker: A total of £5,000 was spent in 1988 and in 1989 under a gift scheme run by Her Majesty's ambassador in Havana: the items involved were principally books and information equipment for local institutions. Data for 1990 is not yet available.

Assistance Unit

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are currently working within the joint FCO/ODA assistance unit.

Mrs. Chalker: Twenty-three.

Know-how Funds

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current advisory board members of each of the United Kingdom know-how funds.

Mrs. Chalker: The composition of the advisory board for central and eastern Europe is as follows:

Mr. George Robertson, MP
Sir Russell Johnston, MP
Mr. Nigel Forman, MP
Mr. Gavin Laird, CBE
Dr. Zbigniew Pelczynski
Dr. John Howell
Mr. Angus Cargill
Sir Frank Lampl
Dr. Dennis Deletant
Mr. Ralph Land
Dr. Edwina Moreton
Dr. N. S. Wooding, CBE
Ms. Hella Pick

Professor Crampton
Mr. John Murphy

Eastern Europe

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any of his officials are currently advising east European countries on privatisation policies.

Mrs. Chalker: Advice on privatisation in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia is being given, not directly by officials but by British financial consultancies and individuals under contracts paid for by the know-how fund.

THE ARTS

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister for the Arts if there have been any items accepted in lieu of tax or allocated since an announcement was last made on the subject to the House.

Mr. Renton: Since my announcement on 19 December 1990, at column *175*, I am pleased to announce that three further offers have been accepted. These consist of a collection of photographs by and of Cecil Beaton, a collection of private and Post Office telegraph stamps of Great Britain—1854 to 1881—and a collection of 38 paintings connected with East Anglia including a number of works by Pieter Tillemans together with a George III cabinet. These offers will satisfy £125,331, £113,000 and £211,552·80 respectively. No decision has yet been taken on the allocation of the Beaton photographs or the stamp collection, but the paintings and cabinet will be allocated to the Norwich Castle museum in accordance with the condition on which the offer was made. As with previous "hybrid" offers, the Norwich Castle museum agreed to pay the offerer an element of the difference between the tax liability and the special price.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what method he intends to legislate for the proposed privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: Since the matter is in the "transferred" field, it is proposed to legislate for the privatisation of NIE by an Order in Council under the Northern Ireland Act 1974. A small number of consequential amendments to certain United Kingdom enactments may need to be effected by a separate order under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. Any necessary taxation provisions, as "excepted" matters, would be contained in a Finance Bill.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Needham: On 6 December 1990 the Department of Economic Development issued a consultative paper on energy efficiency in Northern Ireland. It set out the extensive initiatives already under way to promote energy efficiency in the Province; by all other interested parties through a "Partnership in Action" programme. Specific recommendations for further action were made and comments on the consultative paper have been requested by 1 March 1991. A copy of the consultative paper has been placed in the Library.

Since 1984 Northern Ireland has had its own interdepartmental committee on energy efficiency. It monitors annual energy use by Government and submits reports to the Secretary of State. In addition, Northern Ireland participates in the United Kingdom-wide ministerial group on energy efficiency. Moreover, schemes of assistance for low-income households and the best practice programme are operative in Northern Ireland.

In the calendar year 1990 expenditure on energy in the Northern Ireland Government office estate was £2·1 million which represents a 5 per cent. reduction compared with the previous calendar year in 1990 price terms.

Constituencies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the size of the electorate in each Northern Ireland constituency; and what they were immediately following the last revision of parliamentary boundaries in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of electors in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland on the electoral register in 1990 and in 1983—the first register with details of the revised parliamentary constituencies—was:

Constituency	*1990 Register*	*1983 Register*
Belfast East	53,933	56,065
Belfast North	56,991	61,703
Belfast South	53,516	54,115
Belfast West	57,456	60,404
East Antrim	63,025	59,372
East Londonderry	75,407	68,215
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	70,535	68,913
Foyle	74,558	67,918
Lagan Valley	71,904	60,685
Mid Ulster	69,415	64,840
Newry and Armagh	68,154	62,896
North Antrim	69,562	63,951
North Down	68,496	62,194
Strangford	68,242	60,813
South Antrim	66,763	59,931
South Down	75,364	67,723
Upper Bann	67,281	61,447
Totals	1,130,602	1,061,185

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to give discretion to social fund officers, during spells of severe cold weather, to make cold weather payments in cases of need.

Mr. Hanley: This is not in accordance with the regulation of the scheme.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the last occasion on which cold weather payments were made by the Department of Health and Social Services; how many recipients received payments; and what was the total cost to the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Hanley: Cold weather payments totalling £233,194 were made to 46,646 people in respect of the winter of 1986-87.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to grant cold weather payments to (i) pensioners, (ii) those in receipt of income support and (iii) those in receipt of other benefits.

Mr. Hanley: There are no plans to alter the present scheme which provides for a payment of £5 for any period of seven consecutive days during which the average temperature is 0 deg. Celsius or below. Those eligible are people getting income support which includes one of the pensioner or disability premiums or who have a child under five living with them. People aged 60 or over can have savings of up to £1,000 without the payment being affected. For other claimants the corresponding limit is £500.

Domestic Heating Fuel

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average increase in the price of home heating fuel since 2 August 1990.

Mr. Needham: The increase in prices of home heating oils peaked at the end of October 1990 at between 70 and 90 per cent. above those at 2 August 1990. Current prices are 33 to 38 per cent. above those on 2 August 1990. Some smokeless coal prices have risen by 14 to 17 per cent. in the same period, which included the removal of summer discounts on 8 September 1990.

Government Appointees

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of all Government-appointed nominees to each education and library board since its formation, giving the year of appointment and the length of service in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 16 January 1991]:* The education and library boards were established in 1973 and are now in their fifth term of office having been reconstituted every four years. The information requested about the membership of the boards during their first four terms could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. All board members are appointed by the head of the department, regardless of the source of their nomination. The current membership of the boards, excluding district council members who are selected for appointment by their councils, is as follows:

Western Board

1. *Members appointed July 1989*
   Mr. S. J. Burnside[1]
   Mr. T. B. Campbell
   Rev. R. W. W. Clarke[1]
   Rev. C. Clerkin
   Rev. O. Crilly[1]
   Rev. P. Crilly
   Rev. K. J. Devlin (*resigned* 12 December 1990)[1]
   Mr. M. J. Fegan[1]
   Mrs. M. T. Grant
   Rt. Rev. B. D. A. Hannon[1]
   Mrs. S. C. Hogg[1]
   Mrs. T. Kelly
   Mr. P. Little
   Mr. J. S. R. Maxwell
   Mr. J. C. A. McGinnis (*resigned* 23 May 1990)
   Mrs. B. B. McIvor[1]
   Mrs. S. M. O'Kane[1]
   Mr. P. I. O'Neill
   Mr. R. E. Wright
2. *Replacements appointed since July 1989*
   Mrs. M. T. Breslin (*appointed* 6 November 1990)
   One vacancy to be filled

Southern Board

1. *Members appointed July 1989*
   Rev. J. M. Barton[1]
   Mr. F. H. Bell[1]
   Very Rev. J. Bradley[1]
   Mr. M. P. Campbell[1]
   Rev. D. Chillingworth
   Mrs. M. P. Faulkner[1]
   Mrs. W. J. Gaffney
   Mr. W. F. Gillespie[1]
   Rev. Bro. L. S. Kelly
   Mr. A. J. Lavery[1]
   Mr. W. K. Lowry
   Rev. S. A. Matthews[1]
   Mrs. R. Moore (*resigned* 19 May 1990)[1]
   Mr. T. O. Mulligan[1]
   Mr. F. G. K. McCann
   Sr. O. McConville[1]
   Mrs. J. McCool
   Very Rev. Canon C. McEntegart[1]
   Mr. E. W. Napier[1]
   Mrs. M. O'Hagan
   Mrs. S. E. Walker
2. *Replacements appointed since July 1989*
   Mr. J. H. McParland (*appointed* 14 January 1991)

South-eastern board

1. *Members appointed July 1989*
   Mr. R. A. Adams (*resigned* 31 December 1989)
   Mr. S. A. Costello
   Rev. T. V. Craig
   Mr. S. I. Davidson[1]
   Rev. S. M. J. Dickson
   Mrs. L. P. Douglas[1]
   Rev. W. H. Gray[1]
   Miss R. B. Lavery
   Mr. W. D. Linton[1]
   Rev. G. W. Loane (*resigned* 28 November 1990)[1]
   Mr. S. Mackell (*resigned* 30 November 1989)[1]
   Mr. W. J. Masterson
   Mr. P. McAleenan
   Mr. W. G. McCourt[1]
   Mr. D. W. G. Nesbitt[1]
   Mr. P. O'Donoghue (*deceased* 30 July 1989)[1]
   Rev. Prof. T. S. Reid[1]
   Mr. J. A. Savage (*deceased* 28 December 1989)[1]
   Mr. H. R. Small[1]
   Rev. K. J. Smyth
   Rev. D. Whyte
2. *Replacements appointed since July 1989*
   Mrs. M. B. Donnelly (*appointed* 12 February 1990)
   Mrs. M. Doris (*appointed* 1 February 1990)
   Mr. K. Kilpatrick (*appointed* 5 September 1990)
   Mrs. D. Tennis (*appointed* 25 April 1990)
   One vacancy to be filled

North-Eastern Board

1. *Members Appointed July 1989*
   Rev. D. Clarke
   Rev. R. Devine
   Mr. J. Donaghy[1]
   Rev. Chancellor J. A. Fair[1]

Miss A. Graham[1]
Mrs. P. A. Lerwill[1]
Mr. C. Lynn[1]
Mr. W. F. Lutton[1]
Mr. J. Meehan
Mr. W. H. McKeown[1]
Mr. A. Patterson
Rev. R. F. S. Poots[1]
Mrs. K. Regan[1]
Mr. N. J. Russell[1]
Mr. T. F. Scullion[1]
Mrs. M. C. Shaw
Mr. R. Waterman[1]
Mrs. D. M. White[1]
Rev. J. Williamson
Rev. J. R. Wilson[1]
Rev. T. H. Wilson[1]

2. *Replacements appointed since July 1989*
None

Education and Library Board Members Appointed for 5th Term (ie July 1989 to June 1993)

Belfast Board

1. Members appointed July 1989
Mr. A. C. Cochrane
Mr. J. J. Collins
Rev. T. D. Cooper
Canon E. P. M. Elliott (deceased 19 October 1990)[1]
Mr. P. B. Finn
Mr. M. P. Fitzmaurice
Mr. J. Lally
Mrs. E. G. Lyttle
Miss T. A. Magee
Mr. O. J. Magill[1]
Mr. J. G. Maguire
Rev. M. Murphy[1]
Rev. J. McAllister[1]
Mr. L. McBrinn
Mr. D. J. McGuinness
Mrs M. F. McNally[1]
Miss A. McSparran[1]
Rev. E. O'Brien[1]
Mrs. A. M. Odling-Smee
Rev. Dr. J. Thompson
Mrs. J. M. V. Thompson

2. *Replacements appointed since July 1989*
None
One vacancy to be filled

[1] Indicates members who also served on the boards during all or part of the previous term—July 1985 to June 1989)

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education, Bexley

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what representations he has received concerning the future of Howbury Grange school, Erith;

(2) what representations he has received concerning the development of secondary education within the London borough of Bexley.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has received one letter, which expressed concern about the future of the Howbury Grange school. No other representations have been received concerning the development of secondary education in Bexley.

Capital Expenditure

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what formula English counties' individual allocation of capital expenditure on education for 1991-92 was calculated.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what expenditure assumptions he made for commitments to projects in Devon started in 1990-91 or earlier when determining his capital authorisations for Devon for 1991-92.

Mr. Fallon: In determining each authority's annual capital guideline, my right hon. and learned Friend applied the objective criteria set out in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 17 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *41-50*.

For committed expenditure, account was taken of the second and third year costs of projects and work allowed for in the 1989-90 and 1990-91 allocations and annual capital guidelines for Devon, as in all other English LEAs. For plans to provide new school places in areas of population growth, cost multipliers, reflecting the average cost to authorities of providing a new school place, as well as different regional building costs, were applied to the net deficit of places indicated by each authority in its capital plans. This amount was then phased over three years beginning in 1991-92 in the ratio 35:50:15.

For projects to remove surplus places, full account of authorities' actual cash plans for building works were allowed for when these arose from approved statutory proposals; or in the case of projects unrelated to statutory proposals, where these were cost-effective.

After allowing for a number of projects at special schools and allowing for authorities' liabilities arising from agreed projects at voluntary aided schools the resources remaining for schools were distributed to each authority for improvement/replacement work at schools on the basis of a formula. This formula took account of the authority's cash plans for improvement/replacement work, its pupil numbers and the numbers of substandard places it had.

Capital allocations for local authority further education—LAFE—for 1991-92 were determined as follows:

a. allocations for bids for major building projects—those valued at £200,000 or more—were made on the basis of value for money and in competition with other bids; and
b. allocations for minor works and equipment were made on the basis of weighted full-time equivalent student numbers and the value of bids.

Commitments in LAFE are limited solely to allocations arising from the further years of major building projects which the Department has specifically approved as part of the process which I have already outlined, with the whole being subject to the availability of sufficient funding in any particular year.

The figures set for each of these component parts were then added together to provide the annual capital guideline.

Refugees (Course Fees)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will permit all refugees to pay home student fees for courses of over 15 hours per week.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Under existing arrangements, those granted refugee status by the Home Office are afforded home fee status for full-time courses of further and higher education of not less than 15 hours per week; in cases where they receive a mandatory award, this includes payment of their tuition fees.

Spelling

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research has been undertaken on behalf of his Department on methods of teaching spelling.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Spelling is a vital skill for pupils to learn, but I do not prescribe the methods by which it is taught. My Department has not commissioned research on the subject.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice has been given by his Department or by the Council for the Accreditation of Teachers Education to teacher trainees on methods of teaching spelling.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. I expect teacher training institutions to introduce their students to a broad range of sensible methods.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science in what manner the information and experience of the adult literary and basic skills unit as to the teaching of spelling has been communicated by his Department to teacher trainees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The unit publishes a range of materials, which are available to all, including teacher trainers and student teachers. But the unit's responsibility and expertise relates to the teaching of adults rather than children.

Capital Authorisations (Devon)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) in determining Devon's capital authorisation for 1991-92, what assumption he made as to the amount which Devon could raise by way of capital receipts from disposal of land and other assets, in the current property market;

(2) in determining the quantum of Devon's capital authorisations for 1991-92, what assumption he made as to Devon's ability to augment this by funding from its revenue budget.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend took no account of capital receipts likely to be realised nor of possible transfers from the revenue budget in deciding the level of Devon's annual capital guideline for education for 1991-92. However, the size of Devon county council's basic credit approval, which is the limit to which it can borrow to fund all its capital programmes, reflects an estimate of Devon's likely receipts position.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which of the projects submitted to his Department by Devon education authority as part of the bids process for capital authorisation for 1991-92 were not taken into account in the final capital authorisation of £7·7 million.

Mr. Fallon: Devon's annual capital guideline bid was considered against the objective criteria set out in detail in the Department's letter of 31 May which sought bids for capital expenditure in 1991-92.

Allowance was made for the cost of providing new school places in respect of all of the individual projects listed in the authority's capital plans. Of projects to remove surplus school places, that at Teignmouth community college was not allowed for. No specific allowance was made for any individual improvement or replacement projects. Such work falls to be covered from the resources distributed by formula to all authorities. No allowance was made for the special education project at Exmouth Hillcrest school nor in respect of the authority's liability for those projects at voluntary aided schools which were not approved for a start in 1991-92.

The further education allocations for Devon education authority which were announced by my right hon. and learned Friend last December did not cover the capital cost arising from statutory school reorganisation in Tiverton. My right hon. and learned Friend will shortly be considering the award of a supplementary credit approval for the 1991-92 financial year for the proposed new tertiary college on the site of East Devon college of further education.

It is, of course, entirely for Devon to determine its priorities and which projects should proceed.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account he took of the capital costs of implementing the reorganisations he has made for Axminster and Tiverton when determining the capital authorisation for Devon for the next financial year; and what figures were used when allocating the capital authorisation for Devon.

Mr. Fallon: The Tiverton proposals had not been decided at the time that Devon education authority's annual capital guideline for 1991-92 was announced. As is normal practice, a small proportion of the capital costs of the building work arising from the proposals, as set out in the authority's 1991-92 capital bid, was included in the annual capital guideline. The balance was held back to be issued as supplementary credit approvals, if the proposals were approved. The authority has presented some revised phasing of the costing following approval, and in line with those we shall issue a supplementary credit approval of £342,000 for the Tiverton project in 1991-92.

The building works arising from the Axminster proposals were put forward by the authority as improvement/replacement work in its 1991-92 capital bid. These costs have not, therefore, been covered individually in the annual capital guideline, but will fall to be met from the formula distribution for such work made to all authorities.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what capital authorisations for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools he has made for 1991-92, under the headings (i) all local education authorities in England and Wales, (ii) all counties in England and Wales and (iii) Devon; and if he will indicate for each of the above headings, the number of pupils of statutory school age in January 1990.

Mr. Fallon: The information that my hon. Friend has requested will take time to put together. I shall write to him when it is available.

Iraqi Students

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will be in a position to write to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, in respect of Iraqi students, following his reply of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *555;* and if he will publish this correspondence in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 January.

School Visits

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* details of official visits which he has made to schools, with date and purpose of each visit and the type of school visited.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 26 November 1990 I visited Ribston Hall grant-maintained grammar school. On 30 January 1991 I visited Stockington first and middle schools, Nuneaton, and Alderman Smith high school, Nuneaton. I have met school pupils and teachers on several other occasions since my appointment on 5 November 1990.

Science and Engineering Research Council

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the level of funding for SERC for the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 in *(a)* current and *(b)* constant prices.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The SERC's grant in aid from this Department was as follows:

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Cash	367·595	406·162	440·752
1990-91 prices	422·307	438·654	440·752

Science Budget

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what allowance he has made for the effect of Swiss and other overseas inflation on *(a)* the CERN budget and *(b)* the physics element of the United Kingdom science budget in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The United Kingdom's annual contribution to the CERN budget, and other expenditure on research in the field of physics, is met from grant in aid to the Science and Engineering Research Council allocated annually in the light of the Government's overall decisions on public expenditure and following advice from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. It is for the SERC to determine the distribution of the resources it receives, including those to be directed to international subscriptions for CERN and other organisations. For this purpose, the council will make its own assumptions concerning rates of inflation in the United Kingdom and other relevant countries. The level of grant in aid announced for the financial year 1990-91 was £440·8 million, representing an increase of £34·6 million—8·5 per cent.—over the previous year.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what would be the average central annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools based on section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 returns for local education authorities for which returns are available.

Mr. Eggar: The average full-year equivalent central costs component of annual maintenance grant for the existing 50 grant-maintained schools in 1990-91 is £203,286. Central annual maintenance grant is calculated in accordance with the Education (Grant-maintained Schools) (Finance) Regulations 1990. These calculations take account of data provided by schools and local education authorities, including section 42 returns from LEAs.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the representations which he has received on his paper "The Proposed Arrangements for the Calculation of Annual Maintenance Grant for Grant Maintained Schools for 1991-92"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: By 29 January we had received written comments on our consultation paper from 42 LEAs, 11 schools, and six others. My right hon. and learned Friend will be considering the comments received.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet received the report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions in 1991-92

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have now received the fourth report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions. Its main recommendations are

- a 9·5 per cent. increase in the standard scale for classroom teachers
- a 12·75 per cent. increase in the pay spine for heads and deputies
- a 30 per cent. increase in the value of the five rates of incentive allowances
- an extra 9,100 incentive allowances for the 1991-92 academic year, so that nearly 200,000 teachers will hold the allowances
- a 50 per cent. increase in the upper limit of discretionary scale points to be awarded on top of the standard scale for good classroom performance
- a 9·38 per cent. increase in the value of London allowances and the inner London supplement from 1 July 1990
- greater local discretion about the pay of heads and deputies
- an amendment to teachers' conditions of service to require them to co-operate in new arrangements for their appraisal to be established by regulations.

The committee's recommendations address all the issues that my predecessor asked it to consider when setting this year's remit. They should substantially help the recruitment, retention and motivation of sufficient teachers of the quality the country needs. I am most grateful to the committee for all the work which it put into its report.

The recommendations offer considerable flexibility to make discretionary and selective payments as governing bodies and LEAs judge best in the light of local

circumstances. They are directed towards recognition of good teaching, extra responsibility and scarce qualifications. They will improve career prospects and incentives to promotion within the profession. The committee emphasised the benefits of appraisal for individual teachers, for heads, for the management of schools and ultimately for pupils. It also recognised that appraisal might have a link, although indirect, with pay.

I propose to accept all the committee's recommendations, but, as for the doctors, nurses and other groups covered by the review bodies except the armed forces, to stage their introduction over the period up to 1 December 1991.

The decision to stage was taken in view of the size of the recommendations and for wider economic reasons. It now seems overwhelmingly likely that inflation will fall to 5·5 per cent. by the end of the year. I believe that it is right to reflect the sharp drop in pay expectations in the rest of the economy by the staging of this generous award for teachers.

I propose to increase all pay scales by 7·5 per cent. from 1 April 1991. I propose to implement from the same date the committee's proposals for greater local discretion about the pay of heads and deputies, and to backdate to 1 July 1990 increases in London allowances. The increase of 30 per cent. in the value of incentive allowances would be introduced on 1 December 1991, as would the further increases in the scales needed to bring them up to the full amounts recommended by the committee. The extra 9,100 incentive allowances proposed by the committee would be introduced from September 1991, as it recommended. The committee's recommendations would thus be implemented in full on 1 December 1991. Overall, the increases in the pay bills for school teachers in England and Wales flowing from these proposals would be 8·4 per cent. in 1991-92 and 11·3 per cent. in a full year.

The education standard spending totals we announced last autumn comfortably allow for the cost of implementing these recommendations as well as for the follow-through costs of the 1990-91 pay award. These totals also include an element for the exercise of local discretion introduced following the recommendations of the committee's previous report and of this one which we are assuming will add a further 1·5 per cent. to the pay bill. This leaves plenty of scope for well-managed authorities to find resources for the other pressing demands on the education budget.

I am publishing the committee's report today and have initiated the consultations required by section 3(1) of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 on my detailed proposals for implementing its recommendations.

ENERGY

Sizewell B

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has had any recent discussions with the chairman of Nuclear Electric concerning *(a)* construction delays in the schedule drawn up for Sizewell B, *(b)* the failure of the computer programme design consultants to meet their target in completing the main safety computer programme and *(c)* the revised costings produced by Nuclear Electric and its consultants for the decommissioning and waste management programme for the Sizewell B plant.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The construction of Sizewell B is a matter for Nuclear Electric plc. I understand from the company that the project is eight months ahead of programme. It remains Nuclear Electric's intention that the software for the integrated systems for control and operation of the station should be available to enable commissioning of the station in accordance with the project programme. The latest costs available for decommissioning of Sizewell B or its waste management programme are those presented to the Hinkley Point C public inquiry.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the final capital cost of the Sizewell B nuclear plant on commissioning expressed in *(a)* March 1987 prices and *(b)* present-day prices; what was the estimate 15 months ago; and if he will indicate the reasons for the differences.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In his letter of 26 June 1990 to the Chairman of the Energy Select Committee, the Secretary of State gave the revised estimated cost to completion of Sizewell B as £2,030 million, April 1987 prices, together with a full explanation of the reasons for the revision of the estimate. This remains the latest estimated cost to completion for the project. Over the period from April 1987, the inflation in power station construction costs has been slightly less than in retail prices.

Atomic Safeguards

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has concerning the work of the standing advisory group on safeguards implementation organised under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The standing advisory group on safeguards implementation provides advice to the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Its work is confidential to the group.

THORP

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to institute a near-real time nuclear materials accountancy arrangement for the safeguards provisions at the new thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Detailed arrangements for safeguards at specific sites are confidential. However, BNFL is developing near real time materials accountancy systems in support of safeguards on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant—THORP. Technical reports relating to this technique have been published by BNFL. Details of these publications can be obtained from the company.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he possesses concerning the applicability of Euratom nuclear safeguards to the new BNFL thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield will be fully subject to Euratom safeguards under the Euratom treaty of 1957, as are all other civil nuclear facilities.

Sellafield

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when an assessment was last made of the environmental implications of a serious leak from Sellafield, including the localities which would be most affected; and if he will publish its findings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Assessments of the safety of operations at Sellafield, which include assessments of the possible environmental implications of serious leaks, are the responsibility of BNFL in accordance with conditions attached to the nuclear site licence. These assessments are independently examined by the regulatory authorities in the regular discharge of their statutory functions.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the level to which the public sector is taking advantage of private sector energy efficiency management services and third-party financing for energy efficiency investment; and if he will make a statement on progress.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In taking forward the energy efficiency campaign on the Government estate where Departments are working towards achieving 15 per cent. savings in their energy bills over the next five years, my Energy Efficiency Office employed an energy efficiency management services company to assist Departments in the preparation of their energy strategies. The majority of Departments continue to seek advice from Property Holdings and the Property Services Agency on energy efficiency initiatives, but a number have also commissioned advice from private sector companies.

I understand that a number of Government Departments are presently considering whether third-party financing is a suitable option for their estates. I also understand that certain authorities and local authorities have entered into contracts for third-party financing.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what specific measures his Department has taken to promote energy efficiency; what further measures his Department intends to take to promote energy efficiency; and by what amount and what percentage of its total energy bill his Department's energy bill has been reduced over the past year.

Mr. Wakeham *[pursuant to the reply, 24 January 1991, c. 276-77]:* The table and explanatory footnotes show how effectively the main Government Departments used energy in their HQ type offices for the period April to September 1990.

The league table and performance ratios are an important part of the Government estate campaign where all Departments are working towards achieving savings of 15 per cent. of their energy bill over the next five years.

Department	*Performance Ratio*	*Position*
Welsh Office	0·750	1
Lord Chancellor's Department	0·790	2
Scottish Office	0·830	3
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	0·860	4
Energy	0·920	5
Education and Science	0·920	5
Employment	0·950	7
Home Office	1·010	8
Ministry of Defence	1·050	9
Environment	1·070	10
National Savings	1·090	11
Inland Revenue	1·120	12
Customs and Excise	1·130	13
Health	1·150	14
Northern Ireland Office	1·189	15
Transport	1·192	16
Trade and Industry	1·210	17
Foreign Office	1·290	18
Treasury	1·440	19
Social Security	1·450	20

Notes:

1. The league table of performance is based on Departments' main(HQ) office buildings. In some cases this represents only a small percentage of a Department's energy consumption. Some Departments have calculated their performance indicators using partly estimated data.

2. The performance indicators and yardsticks for these offices are expressed in cost terms using average 1990 prices, ie 6p/KWh for electricity and 1·25p/KWh for *all* fossil fuels.

3. Yardsticks for these offices are as follows:

	April-September £	*Annual* £
Naturally ventilated offices	2·50/m²	7·70/m²
Air conditioned office	7·00/m²	15·50/m²
Computer suites	70·00/m²	140·00/m²

4. A building's energy consumption is adjusted where applicable for regional variations in climate and annual weather differences, divided by floor area and then divided by the appropriate yardstick to obtain its cost performance indicator. A department's overall Performance Ratio is obtained by adding together all its buildings' performance indicators (which are weighted according to respective consumption).

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what policy considerations will determine whether to proceed with the flotation of the two generating companies in the event of a Gulf war precipitating a stock market fall.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All relevant factors will be taken into consideration at the appropriate time.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received regarding actions by the Soviet military in the Baltic states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received more than 50 letters from Members of Parliament on this subject, and a large number of letters and petitions from members of the public and from Baltic emigré groups in the United Kingdom. We have also met the Foreign Ministers of Lithuania and Latvia, who have set out their views on the present situation. We continue to urge all concerned to follow the path of negotiation. In particular, we call on the Soviet authorities to refrain from the use of force or coercion.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken concerning the problems between the Baltic states and the USSR; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made our concern at recent events in the Baltic states very clear. We are pressing the Soviet leadership, both bilaterally and with partners and allies, to refrain from the further use of threats or force. We are urging all involved to undertake serious negotiations. This is the only way to find a lasting solution to this dispute.

Cambodia

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of *(a)* the trade and aid embargo against Cambodia enacted under United Nations resolution 34/22 (1979), *(b)* the initiative by the Thai Government in respect of the provision of neutral camps in border areas and *(c)* the supply of arms through countries bordering Cambodia; and what steps he is taking to promote a ceasefire.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: United Nations General Assembly resolution 34/22 does not refer to a trade and aid embargo against Cambodia. Nor do we operate one. If and when neutral camps in border areas under UN administration are created as part of a comprehensive political settlement, we would be ready to play our part in their establishment. A ceasefire and the cessation of all outside military assistance are integral parts of the draft comprehensive settlement document agreed between the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the co-chairmen of the Paris conference on Cambodia in November 1990.

Human Rights

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in China about the treatment of pro-democracy demonstrators detained in prison.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's embassy in Peking reports regularly on all aspects of China's domestic politics including the detention and the recent trials of those involved in the 1989 demonstrations. We and our European partners have expressed our concern to the Chinese Government over the fate of the detainees on a number of occasions.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in the Soviet Union about human rights abuses involving people of Latvian and Lithuanian origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We receive regular reports from Her Majesty's embassy in Moscow about all aspects of the Baltic states, including matters affecting the civil and political rights of the Baltic peoples. On behalf of the Twelve, the Luxembourg presidency has invoked the CDH —conference sur la dimension humaine—mechanism, which enables CSCE countries to raise cases of human rights abuses with other member states.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Chile about human rights abuses in that country.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have had no reports of human rights abuses since the inauguration of the democratically-elected Government of President Aylwin, which is committed to upholding human rights. It has established a commission to investigate past abuses, released most political prisoners, and changed the law to permit the release of others.

Boat People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the numbers of boat people in Hong Kong; and how many there were 12 months ago.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 24 January 1991 there were 51,871 Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. On 30 January 1990 there were 55,533.

Hong Kong

95. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that any new airport for Hong Kong will be served by a rail link.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a matter for the Hong Kong Government.

Scholarships (Eastern Europe)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will spend on scholarships for students from eastern Europe during 1991-92.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: For 1991-92, we expect to allocate £1·2 million under the FCO scholarships and awards scheme for the provision of some 300 scholarships to enable students from eastern Europe—not including the Soviet Union—to study in the United Kingdom.

As many as two thirds of these awards will be jointly funded with United Kingdom institutions, private trusts and private sector partners.

BBC World Service

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of the BBC World Service in terms of pounds per output hour, at constant prices, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is as follows:

Cost per output hour at 1990 prices

Year	*£*
1980-81	2,117
1981-82	2,078
1982-83	2,076
1983-84	2,118
1984-85	2,207
1985-86	2,185
1986-87	2,079

Year	£
1987-88	2,104
1988-89	2,401
1989-90	2,278

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the hours of output figure per member of staff of the BBC World Service in each year since 1983

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is as follows:

Output hours per member of staff

Year	Hours
1983-84	13·3
1984-85	13·2
1985-86	12·4
1986-87	12·7
1987-88	13·2
1988-89	13·6
1989-90	14·1

In 1986, 71 staff posts were transferred from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the BBC world service.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current shortfall in staffing levels in Foreign and Commonwealth offices overseas posts by grade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There is no such shortfall: it is our policy to fill all posts overseas.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the last five years the number of secondments *(a)* into and *(b)* out of his Department; and if he will give details of which Departments were involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Tables I to V contain details of inward and outward secondments between other Government Departments and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the last five years. Secondments between the Overseas Development Administration and diplomatic wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are shown separately, as are secondments to the Cabinet Office.

In addition to exchanges with other Whitehall Departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has an interchange programme with the private sector. Details of these secondments over the last five years are contained in tables VI and VII.

Table I (Part a)
Number of DS Officers on loan from the FCO to the Home civil service at 31 December 1990

Receiving department	Number
Treasury	1
MAFF	1
ECGD	—
DTI	9
NIO	1
MOD	8
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	12
ODA	1
Home Office	1
Privy Council Office	1
Other	4
	41

Table I (Part b)
Number of Home civil service Officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1990

Parent department	Number
DTI	28
MAFF	11
MOD	23
Employment	5
Home Office	93
Treasury	7
DOE	—
Northern Ireland CS	2
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
CAA	1
Energy	1
Customs and Excise	11
ODA	23
Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Health	2
	216

Table II (Part a)
Number of DS Officers on loan to the Home civil service at 31 December 1989

Receiving department	Number
Treasury	1
MAFF	1
ECGD	1
DTI	7
NIO	2
MOD	8
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	11
ODA	5
Other	1
	39

Table II (Part b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1989

Parent department	Number
DTI	26
MAFF	10
MOD	22
Employment	6
Home Office	70
Treasury	8
DOE	1
Northern Ireland CS	2
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
CAA	1
Energy	1
Customs and Excise	9
ODA	26
Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Health	2

Parent department	Number
Total	193

Table III (Part a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the home civil service at 31 December 1988

Receiving department	Number
ECGD	1
DTI	10
NIO	2
MOD	4
MPO	3
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	10
ODA	4
Home Office	1
Treasury	1
Total	38

Table III (Part b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the DS at 31 December 1988

Parent department	Number
DTI	23
MAFF	11
MOD	22
Employment	8
Home Office	73
Treasury	6
DOE	1
Northern Ireland Civil Service	3
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
Civil Aviation Authority	2
Energy	2
Customs and Excise	10
ODA	23
Department of Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
	193

Table IV (Part a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the Home civil service at 31 December 1987

Receiving department	Number
ECGD	1
DTI	9
NIO	1
MOD	4
MPO	4
Office of Fair Trading	2
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	11
ODA	4
Home Office	1
	38

Table IV Part (b)
Number of Home Civil Service Officers on loan to the DS at 31 December 1987

Parent department	Number
DTI	22
MAFF	11
MOD	21
Employment	8
Home Office	65
Treasury	6
DOE	1
Northern Ireland Civil Service	4
NIO	3
Scottish Office	1
Civil Aviation Authority	2
Energy	3
Customs and Excise	10
ODA	22
Department of Transport	4
	183

Table V Part (a)
Number of DS Officers on loan to the Home Civil Service at 31 December 1986

Receiving department	Number
DTI	12
NIO	2
MOD	3
Energy	1
MPO	4
Office of Fair Trading	2
Law Officers Department	1
Home Office	2
Cabinet Office	13
ODA	5
Treasury	2
	47

Table V (Part b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the DS at 31 December 1986

Parent department	Number
DTI	23
MAFF	13
MOD	24
Employment	6
Home Office	31
Treasury	5
DOE	1
Northern Ireland Civil Service	5
NIO	2
Scottish Office	1
Civil Aviation Authoroty	2
Energy	3
Customs and Excise	7
ODA	18
Department of Transport	5
	146

Table VI

Diplomatic Service:Interchange with the private sector: Secondments into the Diplomatic Service

Organisation

Starting during 1990
Barclays
British Gas
Bank of England
British Telecom
BNF

Starting during 1989
Nil

Starting during 1988
Jaguar
BP
Peat Marwick

BNF
BDH Chemicals Ltd.

Starting during 1987
Bank of England
Shell
Barclays

Starting during 1986
Bank of England
BP
De La Rue
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells
Peat Marwick

Table VII
Interchange with the private sector:
Secondments from the Diplomatic Service

Organisation
Starting during 1990
Price Waterhouse
Barclays
Hongkong Bank

Starting during 1989
Northern Engineering Industries
London Chamber of Commerce
De La Rue
Hambros
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
British Aerospace
Thorn EMI
British Gas
London Chamber of Commerce

Starting during 1988
Smiths Industries
Thorn Lighting
BBC
Shorts, Vosper Thornycroft, GKN

Starting during 1987
Rank Xerox
ICI

Starting during 1986
British Aerospace
Barclays

Arabic Broadcasts

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any plans exist to use BBC transmitters in Oman and Cyprus for special broadcasts in Arabic to the people of Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There is none. The BBC World Service continues to use the transmitters in Oman and Cyprus for its regular broadcasts in English and Arabic, which can be heard throughout the middle east, including Iraq. Since the crisis began, in August 1990, the BBC has increased the hours of Arabic transmissions from nine to 14 hours a day and those of English broadcasts to 24 hours a day in the region.

Military Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Monklands, West on 21 January, *Official Report*, column 49, he will list those nations receiving British military aid since 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The nations are Belize, Dominica, the Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Maldives, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Seychelles and Tonga.

Aid (Eastern Europe)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the assistance given over the past 12 months to *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Hungary, *(c)* Czechoslovakia and *(d)* Yugoslavia in the (i) food aid, (ii) technical assistance, (iii) trade access, (iv) export credits, (v) investment, (vi) training, (vii) environment and (viii) stabilisation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Commission, as chairman of the Group of 24 donor countries, publishes a regular "scoreboard" of assistance to eastern European countries. The latest edition, issued on 30 January, will be placed in the Library of the House.

Prisoners of War (Iraq)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received concerning Iraqi treatment of British prisoners of war in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We need no representations to express our disgust at the Iraqi treatment of allied POWs in Iraq. Iraq has been in breach of her obligations under the third Geneva convention. It has paraded and interrogated captured allied airmen before the television cameras, has announced they would be sent to strategic sites, that some had been wounded and that one was now dead. Specifically, Iraq has breached article 13 which says that POWs must at all times be protected against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity, article 17, as regards interrogation, and article 19 as regards evacuation out of danger. Finally, article 23 states that no POW may at any time be sent or detained in areas where he may be exposed to the fire of the combat zone, nor may his presence be used to render certain points immune for military operations. Using the POWs as a human shield as Iraq claims to have done would be seen as a serious breach under the terms of article 23.

We have been in very close touch with the International Committee of the Red Cross. Our mission in Geneva has drawn each successive report to its attention immediately and asked for verification. Specifically on 29 January, we immediately informed it of Iraqi media reports on the wounding and possible death of an allied POW and asked that it seek confirmation as rapidly as possible. So far Iraq has refused to give access to the ICRC and has not notified it of the capture of any POWs. Representations have been made to the ICRC by other allied countries and by the presidency on behalf of the EC. We have also asked some Governments who may have good contacts with the Iraqis to press them to comply with their obligation. In addition, I have summoned the Iraqi ambassador twice, most recently on 29 January, to whom I made clear Iraq's obligations under the convention. The ambassador in Geneva made representations on humanitarian grounds to his Iraqi counterpart who undertook to pass the demarche to Baghdad. We are exploring what other avenues may be open.

Honorary Consuls

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the duties of honorary consuls; and what remuneration they receive.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Under the supervision of a superintending post, honorary consuls can perform most functions of career consuls. Their main role, however, is helping and advising British nationals who find themselves in difficulty in their area.

They provide a valuable and cost-effective service in areas where there is no career post. Honorary consuls are not paid a salary. However, they may receive an honorarium of up to £1,000 per annum in acknowledgement of their services and certain office expenses.

Youth Exchange Centre

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many young people since 1985 have taken part in reciprocal exchanges between the United Kingdom and other countries through the youth exchange centre; and what criteria are used for choosing participants.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since 1985, a total of 91,559 young people have taken part in reciprocal exchanges between the United Kingdom and other countries through the youth exchange centre. Participants are sought from among young people of 15 to 25-years-old who would not otherwise be likely to have the opportunity of any kind of international experience.

Iraq

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial visits have been made from his Department to Iraq since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There have been seven visits to Iraq by Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers since 1979.

The Gulf

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the actual amount of Japanese financial assistance to the allied war effort in the Gulf up to 24 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The original contribution offered by the Japanese was $2 billion for the multinational forces and $2 billion for economic assistance to Jordan, Egypt and Turkey. On 24 January a further contribution of $9 billion for the multinational forces was announced by the Japanese Government.

TRANSPORT

Inflammable Cargoes

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the amount of inflammable cargo transported by road for each year since 1980.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is in the table. Available road freight statistics do not indicate whether commodities are inflammable. However, figures are provided for petrol and petroleum products. The table shows the amount of petrol and petroleum products and all commodities transported by road. This is shown in tonnes and also in tonne kilometres, the latter taking account of the distances the commodities are moved.

Petroleum products and all commodities transported by road: 1980-1989

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Tonnes (million)										
Petrol and petroleum products	74	61	68	68	68	71	62	64	77	65
All commodities	1,383	1,286	1,376	1,344	1,390	1,445	1,471	1,542	1,751	1,807
Petrol and petroleum products (percentage of all commodities)	5·4	4·7	4·9	5·1	4·9	4·9	4·2	4·2	4·4	3·6
Tonne kilometres (billion)										
Petrol and petroleum products	4·3	3·7	3·7	4·2	4·0	4·3	3·7	4·1	4·9	4·5
All commodities	92·4	92·9	93·8	95·1	99·9	102·9	105·4	113·3	129·8	137·4
Petrol and petroleum products (percentage of all commodities)	4·7	4·0	3·9	4·4	4·0	4·2	3·5	3·6	3·8	3·3

Source: Department of Transport.

Cycling Facilities

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in descending order the London boroughs by Department of Transport grant-assisted expenditure on cycling facilities in the last three years.

Mr. Chope: Bids from the London boroughs for transport supplementary grant for cycling facilities come into the category of minor works. Support is given on a block grant and none for specific schemes. The information requested is therefore not available.

Orange Badge Parking

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that the orange badge parking scheme for disabled people is recognised by the central London authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Department of Transport officials met officers from the four London authorities currently outside the national scheme, and members of the disabled persons transport advisory committee—DPTAC—in September

last year to explore the scope for applying some aspects of the orange badge scheme to central London. All four authorities agreed to consider the possibility of granting some concessions to badge holders subject to the implementation of modifications to the scheme now under consideration and to changes in London boroughs parking enforcement powers as envisaged in part II of the current Road Traffic Bill.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that display of the orange badge by anyone other than the legitimate badge holder is made a criminal offence.

Mr. Chope: We have already agreed in principle to the creation of this new offence, which would require legislation.

Trees, Pickburn

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why his Department cut down trees in Doncaster road, Pickburn, South Yorkshire, that were shielding houses from the effects of traffic on the A1(M); who authorised the action, and on what authority it was carried out; and what recompense will be given to the householders.

Mr. Chope: The work on this boundary hedge to encourage growth near ground level is to prevent children and animals from straying on to the motorway. The work was carried out in accordance with the Department's code of practice for routine maintenance introduced in 1985. No compensation is available to nearby householders in these circumstances.

Railways (Security)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss increased security on Britain's railways.

Mr. Freeman: I met the chief constable of the British Transport police on 18 January to discuss current security arrangements on the railways and London underground.

A2 Roadworks

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the length of time roadworks have been undertaken on that stretch of the A2 roadway between Falconwood cemetery, Eltham and Pepper Hill, Swanscombe, since 1 January 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* The periods during which major roadworks have been undertaken on the A2 between Falconwood cemetery, Eltham and Pepper Hill, Swanscombe, since the beginning of January 1983, are as follows:

	Duration (weeks)
A2 in London Borough of Bexley	
May-November 1986	20
March-May 1987	13
October 1987-January 1988	15·5
August-December 1989	13
November 1990—in hand, expected to complete March 1991	(15)
A2 in Kent: County Boundary to Swanscombe	
November 1984-January 1985	12
July-December 1985	19
August 1988-February 1989	26
February-May 1989	14
July-September 1990	10
October-November 1990	5
January 1991—in hand, expected to complete February 1991	(5)

The work largely comprises major maintenance, the provision of hard shoulders, lighting and safety fences.

Speed Limits

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has assessed the possible effect of more stringent enforcement of speed limits on emissions of carbon dioxide and oxides of nitrogen from road traffic;

(2) what would be the effect on emissions of carbon dioxide and oxides of nitrogen from road traffic if speed limits on motorways were *(a)* increased to 80 mph and *(b)* reduced to 50 mph.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 28 January 1991]:* The precise effect of a change in speed limits or enforcement would depend on the way in which average driving speeds were affected. The available evidence suggests that, typically, reducing average speed from 70 to 50 mph would reduce a car's CO_2 emissions by about 20 per cent. and NOx emissions by about 25 per cent.

The rate of CO_2 emissions would increase proportionately more rapidly from 70 to 80 mph and NOx emissions would also rise.

Red Routes

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what quantifiable criteria have been used to measure the operation of the red route pilot project; and on what days and at what times monitoring has taken place.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* The "before" surveys were carried out at a variety of times and on a variety of days during 1990. A full programme of monitoring including "after" surveys is being carried out.

The quantifiable objectives for the pilot scheme are:

- During the working day reduce average journey times—currently 26·5 minutes—and the variation in journey times—presently 15 minutes—thus improving journey reliability along the route.
- Reduce traffic in adjacent rat-runs.
- Improve the reliability of bus services operated so that more run to timetable.
- Reduce casualties along the route and on adjacent roads and thus contribute to meeting the targets for the Boroughs concerned.
- Improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists and reduce conflicts between them and vehicles.

The aim is to achieve the objectives without encouraging an increase in the number of cars being used for commuting into central London and any adverse impact on shops along the route.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision he has made in the red route pilot project for money to be collected and deposited with banks by security vans.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* Although there is no general exemption for security vehicles, arrangements can be made between the police and the operators individually according to the nature and location of deliveries.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the effects of the red route pilot project on traders' businesses along the line of the route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* Since the pilot route opened representations have been received from several businesses. In some cases it has been possible to provide some loading or waiting areas, but in other cases the location of the businesses is such that loading or waiting is not possible without creating congestion or affecting safety. It is too soon to reach conclusions about long-term effects.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* organisations and businesses and *(b)* members of the public responded to the consultation on the red route pilot project.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* A total of 221 responses were made by businesses and 240 by members of the public or organisations. As a result of the consultation, several important changes to the scheme were made, mainly to suit the needs of local business.

Deaths, Edge Hill

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the deaths of three railway workers at Edge Hill railway sidings, Liverpool, on Friday 18 January.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The three men had been called out at 03.40 to repair faulty points at Edge Hill. They had telephoned the signalman, who had reported the fault, to inform him that they were on the way, but he heard no more from them. Later, the fault cleared and the signalman set a route over the points for an empty train bound for Liverpool Lime Street station.

From the evidence available, it seems most likely that the men had started work on site and were struck by the empty train. The crew of a track maintenance machine that passed over the same line shortly afterwards were the first to notice that an accident had occurred. They alerted the signalman who called the emergency services.

An inspector from the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate visited the site later in the day to carry out an investigation. British Rail's internal inquiry began on Monday 21 January. The inspectorate will, on receipt of British Rail's report, decide whether any further action is necessary.

WALES

Whitchurch Hospital

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons have been detained at Whitchurch hospital because of lack of medium secure accommodation for each of the last five years; what has been the cost involved; and whether South Glamorgan health authority has been compensated for that expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: District health authorities are responsible for meeting the health care needs of their mentally ill patients, including those who need to be cared for in secure conditions. The records maintained by South Glamorgan health authority do not allow for precise calculations of the number of patients treated in ward west 3 who might have warranted medium secure acommodation over the past five years, but the authority estimates that 15 or 20 might have fallen into this category. In recognition of the special role undertaken by Whitchurch hospital for this group of patients, additional funding has been made available since 1977 for nursing support. This currently amounts to £180,000 a year. The Welsh Office also helps to fund a hospital social worker at the hospital.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons have been accommodated in the locked ward at Whitchurch hospital for each of the last five years; what has been the extra cost involved; and whether South Glamorgan health authority has been compensated for that expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: South Glamorgan health authority has provided the following breakdown of patients accommodated at ward west 3.

	Number
1986	192
1987	170
1988	166
1989	192
1990	208

No information on extra costs is available. I refer my hon. Friend to my answer earlier today as to additional funding made available by the Welsh Office for Whitchurch hospital's special role.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons detained at Whitchurch hospital have escaped in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Two patients are reported by South Glamorgan health authority to have escaped from ward west 3 over the past five years, in 1987 and 1989. In addition, two patients absconded whilst on authorised parole, both during 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what review he has made of security arrangements at Whitchurch hospital following the escape of Andrew Peter Jones and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for South Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for the provision of medium secure accommodation for persons who are now directed to Whitchurch hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Following my hon. Friend's announcement on 21 February 1990, the all-Wales advisory group on forensic psychiatry is due to report during the spring. In the meantime, work has commenced

on an interim secure unit at Glanrhyd hospital in Mid Glamorgan which is likely to take its first patients during 1991.

Cholesterol Tests

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of tests for high cholesterol blood counts carried out, and the corresponding number of such tests requested, for each health authority, for the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available centrally.

Departmental Personnel

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by his Department in Cardiff and London; and what were the corresponding figures for the last 10 years.

Mr. David Hunt: The numbers of staff employed by the Welsh Office in Cardiff and London over the last 10 years can be fully disaggregated only at disproportionate cost. Setting aside those employed in the main offices outside these locations gives the following figures for 1 October of each year.

1 October	*Number*
1990	1,931
1989	1,809
1988	1,739
1987	1,817
1986	1,842
1985	1,835
1984	1,742
1983	1,690
1982	1,722
1981	1,781
1980	1,844

These include small numbers of staff in the Colwyn Bay office and some education division and CADW staff.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the numbers of speech therapists employed in each county in Wales for each of the years since 1980; and what was the revenue expenditure on speech therapy services in Wales in each year since 1980.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on speech therapists employed and revenue expenditure on speech therapy by health authorities in Wales is given in the following tables. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will share my pleasure at the substantial improvements made since this Government came into office in 1979.

No information is held centrally on the numbers, if any, of speech therapists employed or revenue expenditure on speech therapy by county councils.

Speech therapists in post as at 30 September

Whole-time equivalents

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Clwyd	12·4	12·1	12·7	12·7	14·4	17·6	17·4	23·3	24·7	24·3	29·4
East Dyfed	7·3	7·4	5·4	6·4	8·4	8·4	13·3	13·3	14·0	15·3	15·3
Pembrokeshire			2·0	2·5	4·0	4·0	4·0	6·0	6·0	5·0	5·0
Gwent	7·1	10·0	11·9	12·7	12·8	15·9	16·9	14·9	12·1	15·4	16·1
Gwynedd	6·8	7·5	8·6	8·6	8·0	9·4	11·0	10·0	11·9	11·7	11·3
Mid Glamorgan	11·0	12·5	12·1	13·6	17·6	14·6	12·6	17·0	19·5	18·0	18·4
Powys	4·7	5·6	5·7	6·7	5·8	5·8	4·8	3·8	7·5	8·9	8·4
South Glamorgan	16·4	17·4	15·7	15·7	18·6	28·7	27·0	27·6	27·7	30·8	32·6
West Glamorgan	8·6	8·5	12·6	13·1	13·3	13·2	13·2	14·2	19·7	20·9	17·9

Expenditure on speech therapy in real terms

£ thousands

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Clwyd	164	162	168	191	187	199	233	252	297	353	402
East Dyfed	108	107	117	94	116	139	146	172	190	176	191
Pembrokeshire				35	38	42	45	65	54	61	57
Gwent	129	123	146	163	185	193	209	195	187	170	194
Gwynedd	34	81	111	126	131	139	145	160	162	211	193
Mid Glamorgan	133	157	166	235	186	214	174	192	232	258	248
Powys	49	62	66	78	87	88	87	75	92	135	146
South Glamorgan	192	220	228	221	273	281	392	436	403	453	492
West Glamorgan	105	123	149	169	164	193	178	193	221	255	261

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of cash in real terms has been given in each year, from 1980 onwards, to speech therapy in the NHS and the local education authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Responsibility for the financing and provision of speech therapy services was transferred to the NHS in 1974 at the time of the NHS reorganisation. The level of funding provided for these services is a matter for individual health authorities to determine in the light of their perception of local needs and of available resources. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer earlier today as to information on outturn expenditure on speech therapy in Wales in real terms since 1980.

Environmental Grants

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *126*, on environmental grants, if he will give the total sum available in the special grants (environmental) programme budget for 1991-92; and whether there is a last date for applications.

Mr. David Hunt: The total sum available under the special grants (environmental) programme for 1991-92 is £144,000. Applications were asked for by 15 November 1990, but subsequent applications will be given full consideration subject to funding being available.

Stroke Victims

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the provision for stroke victims of *(a)* speech therapy, and *(b)* occupational therapy.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The provision of speech and occupational therapy for persons having suffered a stroke is a matter for district health authorities to decide in the light of clinical assessment on individual need and available resources.

Welsh Office circular 24/90, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, provides advice and guidance to health and other authorities on the development and provision of services for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities. Annex A of the circular draws attention to the particular needs of stroke patients.

Welsh National Opera

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make a statement about the financial position of the Welsh National Opera.

Mr. David Hunt: I am glad that the Arts Council of Great Britain has now agreed to increase its annual grant to the Welsh National Opera by £300,000 with effect from 1991-92 and that this will also be written into the company's baseline for the succeeding two financial years. This additional grant will enable the WNO to fulfil its planned touring commitment in England and undertake a full programme of activity in future years without incurring trading deficits.

I have also been concerned about the drain on the company's resources occasioned by the high level of interest payments on its accumulated deficit. I have, therefore, exceptionally agreed to transfer £842,000 from within my existing provision to the Office of Arts and Libraries so that the Arts Council can be put in a position to eliminate the projected deficit before the end of this financial year.

I have taken this action in recognition of the Welsh National Opera's unique contribution to Wales. Not only has the company received international acclaim for the quality of its work, but it has presented a positive image of Wales abroad and has supported efforts to promote Wales's economic interests.

The management of the Welsh National Opera company is being given an unparalleled opportunity to build on a secure financial base. It is essential that it should take all appropriate steps to ensure that the company is managed effectively, efficiently and economically. There can be no excuse for further deficits.

I welcome the fact that further arrangements are being made for the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Welsh Arts Council to monitor the company's management and financial performance to ensure that effective budgetary controls are in place. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts also intends to keep a close watch on the situation.

HEALTH

NHS Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the number of nurses employed in the national health service in each year since 1979 and *(b)* the average number of NHS occupied hospital beds in each year since 1979 for which figures are available; and if he will show, in both cases, the percentage change in each year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The available information is given in the table.

NHS nursing and midwifery staff and average number of available and occupied beds England 1979-1989

Year	*Nursing and Midwifery staff at 30 September[1] Whole-time equivalents[2]*	*Percentage change on previous year*
1979	[3]358,400	—
1980	[3]370,100	3·3
1981	391,800	5·9
1982	397,100	1·4
1983	397,100	0·0
1984	397,500	0·1
1985	401,200	0·9
1986	402,700	0·4
1987	404,000	0·3
1988	403,900	−0·0
1989	405,300	0·3
	Average number of occupied beds (thousands)	
1979	293	—
1980	289	−1·4
1981	285	−1·4
1982	279	−2·1
1983	276	−1·1
1984	269	−2·5
1985	263	−2·2
1986	254	−3·4
1987-1988	[4]—	—
1988-1989	[4]—	—
1989-1990	[4]—	—

Sources:
Manpower:
Department of Health (SM13) annual census of NHS non-medical manpower
Beds:
Department of Health (SM12) returns
SH3. return 1979-1986
KHO3. return 1987-88—1898-90

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest hundred (100). Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes agency staff and all qualified nurse and midwives, learners and unqualified nursing staff.
[3] The WTE figures prior to 1981 have not been adjusted to reflect the reduction in the standard weekly hours for nurses, from 40 to 37·5 hours per week, which occurred during 1980-81.
[4] Information not available centrally beyond 1986.

Cancer Deaths

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each regional health authority the number of deaths caused by *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* throat cancer and *(c)* breast cancer for each of the last 10 years; and if he will show in his answer for *(a)* and *(b)* above, by sex.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Salmonella

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions since 1 January 1990 on which the public health laboratory service has identified salmonella in consignments of imported eggs, giving the date of discovery and the country of origin of the consignment; and if he will make a statement on the public health implications.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the tables.

Isolates of Salmonella Enteritidis from imported eggs 1990

Date of isolation 1990	*Country of origin*
9 April	Holland
18 April	Holland
1 June	Holland
2 June	Holland
11 June	Holland
16 July	Holland
16 July	Holland
16 July	Holland
25 July	Ireland
7 August	Holland
8 August	Holland
20 August	Germany
31 August	Belgium
10 September	Holland
12 September	Holland
20 September	Holland
20 September	Holland
24 September	Holland
1 October	Holland
30 October	Holland
17 December	France

Isolates of Salmonella Typhimurium from imported eggs 1990

Date of isolation 1990	*Country of origin*
15 June	Holland
1 August	France
31 August	Holland
21 September	Holland
19 October	Holland
28 October	Holland
8 November	Belgium

Gulf Casualties

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regional health authority and by district health authority, the number of pay beds requisitioned for receiving Gulf casualties; how many national health service beds have been requisitioned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities have not yet been asked to set aside beds for Gulf casualties.

Pay beds are authorised subject only to the statutory requirement that there be no significant disadvantage to NHS patients. Health service managers will ensure that these beds are made available should they be required for Gulf casualties or other priority cases.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of beds available within the Doncaster health authority area in 1980, 1985 and 1990; what is the current actual position; and what are the comparable figures for England as a whole.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of average daily available beds

	1980	*1985*	*1989-90*
England	355,979	325,487	270,334
Doncaster	1,772	1,879	1,657

Number of inpatients treated

	Finished hospital stays (Discharges and Deaths)		*Finished Consultant Episodes*
	1980	*1985*	*1989-90*[1]
England	5,670,001	6,353,812	7,476,625
Doncaster	29,828	39,936	47,926

[1] Figures for 1989-90 refer to finished consultant episodes and should not be directly compared with earlier figures (discharges and deaths).

In 1988-89 when data were collected on both bases, finished consultant episodes in Trent exceeded discharges and deaths by 8 per cent.

Red-eared Terrapins

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there is any medical evidence of human health risks from contaminated red-eared terrapins.

Mr. Dorrell: In every outbreak of salmonellosis investigated by the public health laboratory services communicable disease surveillance centre (CDSC) in England and Wales, questions are asked about contact with pets and other animals. CDSC has yet to document an outbreak associated with terrapins.

A number of studies into terrapin associated salmonellosis have been carried out in the United States of America. These studies are mostly 10 or more years old but a study in 1985 showed that 10 out of 60 infant cases in Puerto Rico has a history of exposure to pet turtles. (In this context turtle is the American term for terrapin.) However, the information from this study cannot be extrapolated to all cases in the United States of America, still less to cases in England and Wales.

The salmonella serotypes most commonly associated with terrapins in the United States of America are rare in this country. In 1989 and 1990 there were no reports at all of infection with S Urbana, the serotype most strongly associated with terrapins in American studies. There is no prima facie evidence that terrapins constitute a significant public health problem in England and Wales.

Waltham Forest Health Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details, including the date it was submitted, of the preparatory application by Waltham Forest health service to become a self-governing trust from April 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waltham Forest health authority originally submitted an expression of interest in becoming an NHS trust in August 1990. A subsequent expression in which Claybury hospital was excluded from the configuration of the proposed trust was submitted on 12 December 1990.

The revised expression of interest was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 14 January this year at column *418*.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to finish consultations with local authority associations on sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultations and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: Officials concluded consultations with local authority associations on the costs of implementing these sections at the end of last year. The outcome of these consultations is now under consideration and a statement will be made in due course.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he now expects to publish the findings of the Royal College of General Practitioners' study into post-abortion trauma, commissioned in 1976; what work his Department is undertaking into the physical and psychological effects of abortion; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The researchers have recently produced papers for publication and others will follow shortly. All the findings of this study will be considered carefully as will the need for further work in this field.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to respond to the Social Services Select Committee's 10th report of Session 1989-90 on the conscience provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are carefully considering the Committee's report and will be publishing our response shortly.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions over the past 10 years and in respect of which properties his Department has specifically agreed that *(a)* capital proceeds and *(b)* revenue arising from the disposal of hospitals for the mentally ill need not be used for the benefit of the mentally ill.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that *(a)* the capital proceeds and *(b)* the revenue arising from the disposal of hospitals for the mentally ill has been used by health authorities for the benefit of the mentally ill, as provided in his Department's handbook "Property Transactions in the NHS"; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure that health authorities are fully aware of the contents of his Department's handbook "Property Transactions in the NHS"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The handbook "Property Transactions in the NHS" was issued widely throughout the NHS in August 1989. It was issued under cover of a health notice HN(89)13 (a copy of which is available in the Library) which, in its annex, listed those occasions when health authorities were required to refer property transactions to the Department. The Department does not routinely monitor compliance with the requirements of "Property Transactions in the NHS", but we have no reason to think the health authorities are not co-operating.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking as a result of the responses he has received to the consultation paper on the provision of hearing aid services under the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: Twelve direct referral pilot projects have been established in hospitals throughout England. These projects are being independently evaluated by a team of researchers from the university of Manchester. We do not expect to have the results of the evaluation before spring 1992.

Elderly People

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to local authorities about publicising the availability of alternatives to the institutional care of elderly or disabled people.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: "Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond: Policy Guidance" was published in November 1990 and issued to local and health authorities. A copy is in the Library. It includes guidance on publishing accessible information on the types of community care services available. Local authorities are expected to include in their published care plans the arrangements made in this respect.

The Policy Studies Institute is carrying out on behalf of the Department a study of user information needs in order to provide further guidance to authorities.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds have been closed in the Mersey region due to the transfer of elderly patients to private or charitable nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: We do not hold this information centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Wilson, the chairman of Mersey regional health authority, for details.

Wakefield Health Authority

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has received from Yorkshire regional health authority regarding the reasons for the current financial position of Wakefield health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service management executive receives regular reports from regional health authorities which monitor the financial position of their districts. In addition, there is regular contact between the national health service management executive and the regional health authorities at all levels.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken by Yorkshire regional health authority to monitor the management of Wakefield health authority over the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: Yorkshire regional health authority has well-established arrangements for monitoring its districts. I suggest the hon. Member contacts Sir Bryan Askew, chairman of the regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set up a full and independent inquiry into the management of Wakefield health authority over the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: No. Management of Wakefield district health authority is the responsibility of Yorkshire regional health authority.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take urgent steps to ensure that the current financial position of Wakefield health authority does not result in further reductions in health care provision within local hospitals or community services.

Mr. Dorrell: It is the responsibility of regional health authorities to allocate finances to the district in the light of local circumstances and priorities.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department is giving to health authorities on the proportion of their budget they should allocate to meeting the costs of extra-contractual referrals.

Mr. Dorrell: District health authorities will need to keep a reserve to cover the costs of expected levels of extra-contractual referrals. These will vary according to local needs and circumstances.

Vinegar

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, over the last 12 months, his officials have met representatives of the vinegar industry to discuss the health implications of the over-consumption of vinegar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Operating Theatre Sessions

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* for each of the past three years and *(b)* for each health district (i) the number of scheduled sessions held in operating theatres, (ii) the number of scheduled sessions that were cancelled, (iii) the number of cases operated on in scheduled sessions and (iv) the total number of cases operated on.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been collected since the financial year 1987-88 and copies of the summary booklet "NHS Operating Theatres Availability and Use" for 1987-88 and 1988-89 have been placed in the Library. The 1989-90 data are due to be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

Household Incomes

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of households in Scotland have a weekly income of less than £100.

Mr. Lang: It is estimated that in 1989 approximately 25 per cent. of households in Scotland had gross income below £100 per week; just over two thirds of these were one-person households. This is the latest year for which information is available from the family expenditure survey.

M8 (Accidents)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many accidents have occurred on the M8 motorway from the St. James intersection at Glasgow airport to Greenock, in each year since the section was opened.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table provides the number of accidents from the M8 St. James intersection, Glasgow airport to Greenock on the M8, A8 (trunk) and A8 (principal) roads to Greenock, over the last five years 1985 to 1989 and to June 1990. Statistics for the motorway section are available only back to 1979. Statistics for the other sections of the route cannot be made available prior to 1985 except at disproportionate cost. Information prior to 1979 is not available.

Number of accidents on the following sections of road

	M8 St. James Intersection to end of the motorway at West Ferry	*A8 (Trunk) West Ferry to Parklea (Port Glasgow Burgh Boundary)*	*A8 (Principal) Parklea to Central Greenock*
1979	15	n/a	n/a
1980	13	n/a	n/a
1981	12	n/a	n/a
1982	9	n/a	n/a
1983	9	n/a	n/a
1984	6	n/a	n/a
1985	10	6	49
1986	8	3	46
1987	4	7	35
1988	11	10	37

	M8 St. James Intersection to end of the motorway at West Ferry	A8 (Trunk) West Ferry to Parklea (Port Glasgow Burgh Boundary)	A8 (Principal) Parklea to Central Greenock
1989	9	7	34
1990[1]	6	4	12

[1] To June.
n/a not available.

Sheep and Cattle

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of support payments paid out in the Highlands and Islands development board area in the most recent year for which there are figures, in respect of *(a)* sheep and *(b)* cattle.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Expenditure on relevant agricultural schemes within the Highlands and Islands development board area is as follows.

	Sheep £'000	Cattle £'000
Hill livestock compensatory allowances[1]	9,471	8,340
Sheep annual premium[1]	9,484	n/a
Suckler cow premium[1]	n/a	5,230
Beef special premium[2]	n/a	350
	18,955	13,920

[1] 1989 scheme expenditure.
[2] Financial year 1989-90.
n/a Not available.

The Highlands and Islands development board itself provides some assistance to the livestock sector: in 1989-90 this amounted to £2,212,000.

The sheep and cattle sectors also benefit from intervention market support and the sheep variable premium. It is not possible to disaggregate this support to specific areas.

Urban Programme

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total urban programme budget for Scotland in the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The total urban programme budget for 1989-90 was £57 million, and for 1990-91 was £68·989 million. These figures include both the central Government and local authority contributions.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total urban programme budgets available in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 in *(a)* Strathclyde, *(b)* Lothian, *(c)* Central, *(d)* Fife, *(e)* Grampian and *(f)* Tayside, together with (i) the actual expenditure for 1989-90, (ii) the actual expenditure so far for 1990-91, (iii) the total project expenditure for 1990-91 in each case.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The resources of the urban programme are not allocated in the form of regional budgets. However, the table gives details for the urban programme of approved project expenditure aggregated for each of the six regions in question and including approved expenditure by both regional and district councils for 1989-90 and 1990-91. The table also provides corresponding information on actual expenditure which is available only for 1989-90. No information is provided for 1991-92 as decisions have still to be taken about the distribution of a substantial portion of the resources which will be available in that year.

Urban programme

Regional council area	1989-90 Approved project expenditure £'000	1989-90 Actual expenditure £'000	1990-91 Approved project expenditure £'000
Central	2,671	2,153	3,444
Fife	1,465	1,203	1,720
Grampian	2,220	2,120	1,787
Lothian	5,771	5,225	7,158
Strathclyde	43,072	37,771	48,212
Tayside	2,859	2,240	4,172

Training Agency

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the actual expenditure of Training Agency budgets in the financial year to date, in each Training Agency area in Scotland;

(2) if he will list the total budgets available to the Training Agency in Scotland in the financial year 1990-91 in each Training Agency area;

(3) if he will publish a table showing the total projected expenditure of Training Agency budgets in the year to date, in each Training Agency area in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is set out in the table, which shows budgets set, actual expenditure to end December 1990, and the latest estimated outturn of expenditure for each Training Agency area office in Scotland. The figures exclude some expenditure incurred centrally by the Training Agency.

Training agency area office	Actual expenditure until December 1990 £ million	Total budget for 1990-91 £ million	Anticipated spend for 1990-91 £ million
Glasgow City	22·2	34·1	32·0
Lanarkshire	14·8	22·2	21·7
Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll	13·9	22·0	20·7
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway	15·1	23·1	20·1
Lothian and Borders	21·4	29·8	28·8
Central and Fife	16·2	25·2	23·9

Training agency area office	Actual expenditure until December 1990 £ million	Total budget for 1990-91 £ million	Anticipated spend for 1990-91 £ million
Grampian and Tayside	16·3	24·6	23·0
Highlands and Islands	7·1	9·9	10·2

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the total budgets agreed at the present time in respect of each proposed local enterprise company within the former Scottish Development Agency area;

(2) if he will list the total budgets proposed by each local enterprise company which is being established in Scotland under Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These are operational matters for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and I have asked the chairmen to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total budgets agreed at the present time in respect of the eight proposed local enterprise companies under Highland Enterprise.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These are operational matters for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the total urban programme budgets available in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 in the following district authority areas *(a)* Clydebank, *(b)* Clydesdale, *(c)* Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, *(d)* Cumnock and Doon Valley, *(e)* Cunninghame, *(f)* Dumbarton, *(g)* East Kilbride, *(h)* City of Glasgow, *(i)* Hamilton, *(j)* Inverclyde, *(k)* Kilmarnock and Loudoun, *(l)* Kyle and Carrick, *(m)* Monklands, *(n)* Motherwell, *(o)* Renfrew and *(p)* Strathkelvin, together with (i) the actual expenditure for 1989-90, (ii) the actual expenditure so far for 1990-91 and (iii) the total projected expenditure for 1990-91, in each case.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The resources of the urban programme are not allocated as budgets for district authority areas. However, the table gives details for the urban programme-approved project expenditure for 1989-90 and 1990-91 for the district councils for the areas in question. These figures do not include approved expenditure by relevant regional councils as this cannot be accurately apportioned to district authority areas without disproportionate difficulty. The table also provides corresponding information on actual expenditure which is available only for 1989-90. No information is provided for 1991-92 as decisions have still to be taken about the distribution of a substantial portion of the resources which will be available in that year.

Urban programme

District Council Area	1989-90 Approved project expenditure £'000	1989-90 Actual expenditure £'000	1990-91 Approved project expenditure £'000
City of Glasgow	8,579	8,746	6,681
Clydebank	183	195	207
Clydesdale[1]	—	—	—
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth[1]	—	—	—
Cumnock and Doon Valley[1]	—	—	—
Cunninghame	531	528	921
Dumbarton	211	174	354
East Kilbride[1]	—	—	—
Hamilton	546	504	664
Inverclyde	172	230	191
Kilmarnock and Loudon	160	115	35
Kyle and Carrick	66	77	79
Monklands	1,553	712	1,917
Motherwell	924	657	884
Renfrew	870	581	1,786
Strathkelvin	158	147	154

[1] Contains no area eligible for assistance under the Urban Programme.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish total proposed budget figures for Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The budget for Highlands and Islands Enterprise will be published in the supply estimates.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the actual expenditure of Scottish Development Agency budgets in the financial year to date in each Scottish Development Agency region;

(2) if he will list the total budgets available to the Scottish Development Agency in the financial year 1990-91 in each Scottish Development Agency region of operation;

(3) if he will publish a table showing the total projected expenditure of Scottish Development Agency budgets in the financial year to date in Scotland, in each Scottish Development Agency region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: These are operational matters for the Scottish Development Agency and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Edinburgh Ring Road

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the closure of lanes on the Edinburgh ring route; and whether the cost of repairs will be borne by central Government.

Mr. Lang: The Edinburgh city bypass is a local road. Responsibility for the maintenance of the bypass is consequently a matter for Lothian regional council as the local roads authority.

Natural Heritage

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give further details of the advice sought by management consultants due to report on the location, staffing and organisation options for Scottish Natural Heritage; who the management consultants are; the expected date of the report's publication; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The management consultants, Ernst and Young, consulted a wide range of interests including relevant public bodies, voluntary organisations and the management and trade union sides of the predecessor bodies. The Scottish Office Environment Department has now received the report. The management and trade union sides of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland are being asked for their views.

Baby Units

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much funding was provided for special care baby units in Scotland for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the location of each special care baby unit in Scotland; how many places are available in each unit; and how many patients are redirected from Glasgow special care baby units when places are full.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards meet the capital and revenue costs of special care baby units from within their normal allocations. The table lists the average number of available staffed special care baby unit beds in Scotland at 31 March 1990. Information on the number of redirected patients is not held centrally.

	Average available staffed beds
Scotland	520
Argyll and Clyde	53
Vale of Leven District General Hospital, Alexandria	18
Ranking Memorial Hospital, Greenock	14
Paisley Maternity Hospital	21
Ayrshire and Arran	28
Ayrshire Central Hospital, Irvine	28
Borders	10
Borders General Hospital, Melrose	10
Dumfries and Galloway	14
Cresswell Maternity Hospital, Dumfries	14
Fife	37
Forth Park Maternity Hospital, Kirkcaldy	25
Dunfermline Maternity Hospital	12
Forth Valley	24
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	12
Stirling Royal Infirmary	12
Grampian	40
Aberdeen Maternity Hospital	40
Greater Glasgow	126
Glasgow Royal Maternity Hospital	28
Stobhill Hospital, Glasgow	19
Rutherglen Maternity Hospital	25
Southern General Hospital, Glasgow	24
The Queen Mother's Hospital, Glasgow	30
Highland	20
Raigmore Hospital, Inverness	20
Lanarkshire	52
Bellshill Maternity Hospital	38
William Smellie Maternity Hospital, Lanark	14
Lothian	72
Eastern General Hospital, Edinburgh	14
Western General Hospital, Edinburgh	15
Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion, Edinburgh	29
Bangour General Hospital, by Broxburn	8
St. John's Hospital at Howden, Livingston	6
Tayside	44
Ninewells Hospital, Dundee	30
Perth Royal Infirmary	14

Schools (Advertising)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify in respect of the current advertising programme on behalf of the SED and independent schools information service *(a)* how many adverts are appearing and are scheduled to appear and in which newspapers, *(b)* whether any television advertising is envisaged, *(c)* the cost of the campaign and *(d)* if he will list the statutory provisions which relate to the incurring of expenditure on, or promotion of, such a non-governmental body.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no advertising programme on behalf of the Scottish Office Education Department and the Independent Schools Information Service.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the relevant bodies which were consulted before the appointment of 11 members to the board of the newly formed Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland announced on 13 December 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No formal consultation was undertaken before the appointment of 11 members to the board of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. A number of individuals and bodies submitted nominations. These were considered along with other candidates.

Fish Farming Advisory Committee

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions the fish farming advisory committee has met; how many cases have been referred to it; and how many opinions on cases it has delivered.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand from the Crown Estate Commissioners that the inaugural meeting of the advisory committee was held in March 1990. One case has been referred to the committee and it determined its opinion at the second meeting in August 1990.

Homelessness

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new and additional finance is being made available to assist *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* voluntary agencies to tackle the problem of homelessness in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Particular attention is given to homelessness needs in distributing provisional housing capital allocations among local authorities. In 1991-92, in addition to the main allocation, totalling over £414 million on the housing revenue account—HRA—and over £105 million on the non-HRA, my right hon. Friend has made available an extra allocation of £2 million specifically to tackle homelessness in the four Scottish cities, including Glasgow. I shall be announcing the distribution of that total among the cities shortly. In addition to the grants already paid to voluntary organisations concerned with homelessness under section 39 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, we are currently considering making funds available to voluntary agencies under section 10(1) of the 1968 Act to enable them to provide support to young people at risk of becoming roofless and to make it easier for them to move into settled accommodation in their own area.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new initiatives he is taking to tackle the problem of homelessness in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Problems associated with homelessness play a large part in determining the Government's housing policies, in particular the distribution of capital allocations to local authorities. The statutory responsibility for advising and housing homeless applicants rests with local authorities. Other housing agencies, including Scottish Homes, also give high priority to homelessness.

Besides developing existing policies, the Government have taken a number of specific initiatives against homelessness which will benefit Strathclyde and the rest of Scotland. These include:

- From April 1991 any deficit incurred by a local authority in operating a homelessness hostel will be met by housing support grant, whether or not the authority would otherwise receive grant.
- An additional capital allocation of £2 million is being made for specific projects to tackle homelessness and rooflessness in the four Scottish cities.
- We expect to issue soon a new version of the code of guidance for local authorities on the homelessness legislation, on which consultations took place late last year.
- Costs which local authorities incur in providing a homelessness service using resources other than council-owned housing will in future be charged to the general fund, rather than to the housing revenue account.
- Glasgow university's centre for housing research have been awarded a contract for a study of the role of social work in the management and prevention of homelessness.

We are continuing to encourage local authorities to establish cash incentive schemes as an effective means of releasing council housing for the homeless. I am pleased that several local authorities are now pursuing this option.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each of the last 10 years, *(a)* the number of local authority dwellings built, *(b)* the number sold, *(c)* the number built by housing associations, *(d)* the number of homeless persons and *(e)* his estimate of the number sleeping on the streets.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of dwellings completed by local authorities and housing associations from 1979 onwards are published quarterly in table 5 of the Scottish Office statistical bulletins on housing trends in Scotland. Copies of these bulletins are sent to all Members representing Scottish constituencies and are available in the House Library. The numbers of dwellings sold by local authorities to sitting tenants are given in table 7 of these publications.

The information held centrally does not enable an estimate of the number of homeless persons and the number sleeping on the streets to be made. Information based on the number of applications received by local authorities under the homelessness legislation was given in a reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on 1 November 1990, at columns *714-15*.

Sandeels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the criteria which will be used to determine whether the proposed closure of the Shetland sandeel fishery will enable sandeel stocks to reach adequate and sustainable levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposal to keep the Shetland sandeel fishery closed in 1991 is based on the latest scientific advice that the level of spawning stock has continued to decline and that the fishery should be closed until the stock recovers. While the decline in stocks has not been caused by fishing, and is related to natural factors affecting recruitment of young fish to the stock, closure of the fishery would represent the maximum protection available for the stock in its current poor condition. The recovery of the stocks will depend principally on future recruitment levels which cannot be predicted.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will provide capital grants to existing sandeel fishermen to assist them in adapting to the fishing of alternative stocks during the period of closure of the Shetland sandeel fishery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. Those fishing vessels normally involved in the Shetland sandeel fishery already fish for other species.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will maintain the proposed closure of the Shetland sandeel fishery for a period which allows the population of Arctic terns to reach a sustainable level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: While a final decision on the management arrangements for the Shetland sandeel fishery in 1991 is subject to consultation with interested parties, a consultation paper issued in December 1990 proposes that the fishery be closed until sandeel spawning stock levels recover. The future availability of juvenile sandeels to Arctic terns is primarily dependent on recruitment to the stock, which is affected by natural factors outwith our control and not by fishing effort.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which private schools receive support from public funds for the assisted places scheme; and how much each received in the financial year 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* The Government do not give direct financial assistance to independent schools. The assisted places scheme provides financial help for parents to send their children to independent schools. It concentrates assistance on low-income families. In the 1989-90 school sesssion 48 per cent. of those benefiting came from families whose total income was less than £8,500.

Operations (Postponements)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations due to take place within hospitals under the Lothian health board have been postponed in each month from October 1990 to the most recent available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 January 1991]:* The number of operations postponed by hospitals in Lothian during the period October-December 1990 was as follows:

	Number
October	16
November	133
December	263
TOTAL	512

The corresponding total for the same period in the previous year was 590.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are available for the payment of attendance allowance to persons who normally reside in local authority homes but who spend periods away from such homes, staying with relatives or friends, for and during holidays and other periods.

Mr. Scott: If the usual qualifying conditons are met, attendance allowance is payable for daily periods (which must include an overnight absence) spent away from a local authority home. The claimant or his representative should inform the Department of any such periods and the allowance is paid in arrears by payable order.

Poor People

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of Government policies on the economic well-being of the poorest decile of the income distribution.

Mr. Jack: Information on the living standards of people living in the lower half of the income distribution is presented in the series of tables "Households Below Average Income 1981-87", copies of which are available in the Library. The tables show that the incomes of those in the lower income groups—including the lowest decile—rose in real terms during that period.

National Insurance

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he will announce the outcome of his Department's review of the procedure for allocating national insurance numbers;

(2) whether his Department intends to consult the Commission for Racial Equality and organisations working with refugees in its review of the procedure for allocating national insurance numbers.

Mr. Jack: Following an internal review of procedures, it was decided that when foreign nationals are restricted from seeking work in this country we would no longer inform the Home Office when a national insurance number is issued for benefit purposes only. The Department now accepts a wider range of documents as evidence of identity.

The review took careful account of views expressed by organisations working with refugees.

Poverty

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his Department's latest official figures for the number of people living in poverty in Scotland.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 30 January 1991.

Backdated Claims

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefits for which claimants may backdate claims for proven good cause within a prescribed time.

Mr. Scott: The benefits for which claims may be backdated for proven good cause are as follows:

- Unemployment Benefit
- Sickness Benefit
- Invalidity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Disablement Benefit (including increases of Disablement Benefit)
- Reduced Earnings Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Community Charge Benefit
- Family Credit
- Social Fund Payments in respect of maternity expenses, funeral expenses and expenses for heating incurred in a period of cold weather.

Concessionary Fuel

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the lump sum payment offered by British Coal to retired concessionaires entitled to cash in lieu of concessionary fuel will be classified as capital; and if it will affect future payments of means-tested benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: Lump sum payments are normally treated as capital in the income-related benefits, and do not affect entitlement to benefit unless they take a person's total capital to over £3,000. However, where the

adjudicating authority decides that a person has deprived himself of regular payments of cash in lieu of concessionary coal in exchange for a lump sum payment for the purpose of obtaining benefit, or an increase in benefit, the person will be treated as if he is still receiving that income. We are asking British Coal to advise benefit claimants to seek advice before making a decision.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to change the definition of non-dependants in relation to the qualification for severe disability premium.

Miss Widdecombe: There are no current plans to do so.

Family Credit Office (Blackpool)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in the *Official Report* the performance targets for the family credit office at Blackpool indicating which are not yet being achieved.

Mr. Jack: The information is in the table:

Performance target	*Achievement*		
	1988-89	*1989-90*	[1]*1990-91*
Clearance rate			
Average of 18 working days	21	19	21
Error rate			
7·0 per cent.	8·6	8·4	7·9

[1] April-December 1990

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken to process a family credit claim by the DSS office at Blackpool.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 16 January at col. *531*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what facilities are made available for telephone contact to be made by members of the public wishing to expedite family credit claims at Blackpool.

Mr. Jack: All claims for family credit are acknowledged by a letter which provides the number of a dedicated telephone inquiry section. This service provides direct contact via 40 telephone lines to a section staffed by experienced assessment clerks with on-line access to the family credit computer system. Claimants are provided with answers to their inquiries from information held on the database. Urgent messages are relayed to the operational sections to expedite claims and call-back arrangements operate to callers who require more detailed information from the assessment officers.

Additional facilities operate for members of the public who visit the local offices of the Department by way of a local office helpdesk service which provides direct contact to an urgent information facility in cases of financial hardship.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the official staff complement necessary for undertaking family credit work at Blackpool; and how many employees are currently employed.

Mr. Jack: The current staffing complement at North Fylde central office to deal with family credit claims is 776. The number of staff employed as at 30 January 1991 was 779.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has undertaken or commissioned to determine what savings are made in common agricultural policy commodity market support by farmers forestalling increased production by joining the environmentally sensitive areas scheme; and what are the results.

Mr. Curry: The Department has commissioned studies from two universities and private consultants. The results so far received are being evaluated and will be taken into account in the review of environmentally sensitive areas policy.

Statistics

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what differences in the statistical methods used there are between "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1990", and "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1989".

Mr. Curry: "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" includes a large number of statistical tables containing figures compiled from a wide range of initial sources. There have been no significant changes in methodology between the 1989 and 1990 issues. However, as indicated in the preface, the figures, and particularly those for the latest (and partly forecast) year, are subject to revision as more information becomes available.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has undertaken or commissioned to reinforce provision in the set-aside scheme to ensure a wider uptake.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to my reply given to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 30 January 1991 at columns *543-44*.

Beef Imports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of beef have been imported from the Republic of Ireland during the last six months; what are the estimates for the next six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Imports of beef and veal from the Republic of Ireland from May to October 1990 (the most recent six-month period for which figures are available) were 31,793 tonnes, down 7,523 tonnes (19 per cent.) compared with the same period in 1989.

The level of imports from the Republic of Ireland will depend on a large number of factors, including developments in middle eastern markets.

Bananas

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on when the European Commission will publish its proposals about the banana market post-1992; and what steps the Government are taking to encourage the Commission to publish its proposals without delay.

Mr. Curry: We understand that the Commission is working urgently on this issue but has not set a date for publishing its proposals. We have made clear to the Commission the importance we attach to achieving a satisfactory outcome.

Sheep and Cow Subsidies

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the sheep subsidy and hill cow payments will be made; what delays there have been in payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the reply, 18 January 1991, c. 616]:* I am pleased to say that the difficulties referred to in the previous answer concerning the introduction of the new limit of 1·4 livestock units per hectare in the HLCA arrangements have now been resolved. Application forms can now be printed and will be issued to producers as soon as possible.

I expect to announce the rates of HLCA payments shortly.

My right hon. Friends and I shall, of course, do all we can to ensure that payments reach producers quickly just as soon as the necessary arrangements are all in place.

EMPLOYMENT

Approved Training Organisations

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of those employment training providers, including training agents and training managers, who commenced on 5 September 1988 have now achieved ATO status; and when he expects the remainder to do so.

Mr. Jackson: As at 30 December 1990, a total of 940 —97 per cent.—employment training providers had achieved stage one and 415—43 per cent.—had also achieved stage two of the approved training organisation award. As training and enterprise councils are established, they are taking over responsibility for making decisions on the remainder of providers in partnership with my Department. My right hon. and learned Friend said in July that he expected the ATO process to be completed not later than April 1991—*Official Report*, column *250*.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of investment in tourism and leisure projects in each of the last five years; and what is his estimate for the next two years' investment.

Mr. Forth: The table gives the latest figures published by the English tourist board of the amount of investment in tourism projects worth £500,000 or more which were completed during each of the last five calendar years. Further projects to a total value of £2,878 million were still under construction on 30 June 1990.

Value of tourism projects completed during the year (England)

Year	*£ million*
1985	247
1986	452
1987	429
1988	605
1989	972

The English tourist board does not publish forecasts of tourism investment.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement concerning the current position of the British tourist industry.

Mr. Forth: The tourism industry is an important component of our economy. It contributes some £22 billion to the United Kingdom's gross domestic product and provides work directly for nearly 1·5 million people. I am confident that the industry, working with the tourist boards, will be able to reassert its position in the world market once the Gulf crisis is resolved. The Government are determined to sustain international confidence in this country as a tourist destination. We have applied strict security measures at international airports and ports, and the security record of British airlines is first class. If visitors are deterred from travelling, this can only advance the potential terrorist's cause.

Employment Training

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have now secured full-time employment directly after completion of an employment training programme undertaken in Hereford.

Mr. Jackson: Information about the destinations of people leaving ET is not held at the local level requested. The nearest area breakdown would be for the county of Hereford and Worcester. Follow-up results for the period August 1989 to July 1990 indicate that three months after leaving 30 per cent. of leavers were in full-time employment.

Earnings

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average weekly rate of pay in *(a)* Southport and *(b)* England.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available for Southport, but figures of average gross weekly earnings in April 1990 for Merseyside metropolitan county, and for England, are published in part E of the 1990 new earnings survey report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Action for Jobs

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the expenditure on regional events for action for jobs in 1986-87 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Jackson: None of the expenditure on Action for Jobs regional events in 1986-87 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Work Permits

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes he is proposing to make in the arrangements for the issue of work permits.

Mr. Howard: In May 1989 the Employment Department published a consultation paper as part of a deregulation review of the work permit scheme. This contained proposals to make the scheme more relevant to changed economic and labour market conditions and to make it more responsive to employers' needs. Those proposals have met with overwhelming support.

The changes I will be making will considerably reduce the formalities for employers who need to bring to the United Kingdom essential staff who are subject to work permit requirements, whilst at the same time maintaining firm immigration control with no relaxation of the conditions required by the immigration rules. Permits will continue to be generally restricted to posts requiring highly qualified and skilled people, where there is no suitable United Kingdom or EC national available and will be for strictly limited duration, related to the essential needs of the employer. Only in exceptional circumstances will permits be given for the four-year period which can qualify an overseas national to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

The main changes to the scheme, which will come into effect as soon as practicable, are as follows:

(i) The evidence required to support an application will be reduced to the necessary minimum. For example, employers will no longer be required to advertise vacancies in the United Kingdom and EC if they can demonstrate that such advertisement would have been inappropriate or unproductive for the post in question.

(ii) Procedures will be simplified to reduce delays and uncertainty when both the Employment Department and the Home Office need to be involved. In future employers will send all applications to the same point of contact in the Employment Department for initial consideration.

(iii) Permits will no longer be resticted to those overseas nationals who have gained their qualifications and experience outside the United Kingdom. It will however remain the case that those admitted as students or for other reasons will not normally be permited to change to employment.

There are a number of other more detailed changes which will simplify the application process for work permits. Full details will be given to those wishing to apply, when revised guidance notes are issued.

The new arrangements will enable the Employment Department to provide a faster, better service taking greater account of the needs of business and resulting in considerable administrative savings for most employers who need to apply for permits. I intend also to recover the costs to the taxpayer of administering the scheme by introducing a service charge for work permit applications. Legislative proposals to allow this will be put forward when a suitable opportunity becomes available.

DEFENCE

Temperature Records

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the (i) maximum and (ii) minimum temperature recorded at each meteorological station in Northern Ireland since 1 December 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The maximum and minimum temperatures reported at stations in Northern Ireland from 1 December 1990 to 26 January 1991 are as follows:

Station	*Maximum deg. C*	*Minimum deg. C*
Aldergrove	11·9	−4·1
Carmoney	12·0	−1·6
Carrigans	12·7	−5·6
Corgary	11·6	−6·7
Knockarevan	12·0	−4·3
Long Kesh	13·0	−6·0

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average temperature recorded *(a)* each day and *(b)* each night at each meteorological station in Northern Ireland since 1 December 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Hourly records are required to produce daily values of the average temperature during *(a)* the day and *(b)* the night. Such information in Northern Ireland is available from only one station, Aldergrove.

The figures are as follows:

	Day	*Night*
December		
1	4·2	4·4
2	6·0	6·0
3	7·4	6·8
4	7·8	6·2
5	6·0	5·5
6	6·2	4·2
7	1·5	−0·5
8	1·2	3·4
9	3·7	0·2
10	2·0	1·5
11	7·3	5·9
12	4·1	0·3
13	2·1	0·8
14	3·4	0·5
15	−1·3	−0·5
16	3·2	4·5
17	2·9	2·3
18	2·7	1·5
19	3·8	5·3
20	7·2	6·5
21	9·6	11·4
22	9·2	4·9
23	6·4	1·9
24	1·9	5·3
25	3·8	4·4
26	6·1	1·7
27	1·7	2·9
28	5·6	2·0
29	1·8	1·0
30	2·3	1·8
31	1·9	1·6
January		
1	9·1	6·9
2	3·2	1·6
3	1·3	2·5
4	3·7	4·3
5	4·2	4·7

	Day	*Night*
6	2·0	0·5
7	1·9	0·3
8	0·3	−0·5
9	1·4	0·9
10	2·0	2·1
11	3·5	0·4
12	1·4	−0·9
13	2·7	2·6
14	3·4	1·3
15	2·6	4·1
16	5·1	4·5
17	6·0	6·2
18	6·3	0·7
19	5·0	8·0
20	8·4	2·2
21	3·0	5·7
22	6·2	4·6
23	5·7	5·5
24	5·8	3·4
25	3·6	−0·1
26	2·3	1·8
27	2·5	—

Temperatures in degrees C. Day covers the period 0900-2100; night 2100-0900.

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether service men and women serving in the Gulf war will be provided with the opportunity to make free telephone calls.

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider the introduction of a system of free telephone calls, limited in number and duration, to the United Kingdom or elsewhere, for service men in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today announced that the Ministry of Defence is introducing a concession on telephone calls equivalent to £10 a month for all service personnel in the Gulf.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider methods of subsidising the postage costs of sending food parcels from the families of those forces serving in the Gulf to the troops in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Forces' concessionary rates for parcel post to service personnel in the Gulf have been available since September 1990.

Under this economy service, parcels are carried at the United Kingdom inland postage rates, which represent a significant saving over the rates for the Post Office's airmail service. Economy service parcels are being carried to the Gulf by RAF aircraft.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has made for the repatriation or local burial of United Kingdom troops killed in the Gulf conflict; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We will arrange for temporary local burial close to the battlefield. Once fighting has ceased the next-of-kin will be offered the option of having the body brought back to this country, wherever that is practical. Appropriate religious services will be arranged in accordance with the wishes of the next-of-kin. For those who die at sea, the decision on whether bodies should be taken ashore for later repatriation or buried at sea remains, as is traditional, with the commander of the vessel in the light of operational circumstances.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present estimated accumulated cost of the British presence in the Gulf arising from the invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 30 January at column *558*.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take to enable medical practitioners who have volunteered for RAMC service in the Gulf to obtain personal insurance from private firms or through the Army PAX scheme at non-inflated rates.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is for individual insurance companies and underwriters to set premium levels in the light of the risks they are accepting. Personal insurance arrangements are, of course, a matter for the individual. The Ministry of Defence is, however, in contact with the insurance industry in order to ensure that new cover remains available to service personnel and that premiums remain as low as possible. We are also able to put personnel into contact with brokers who are experienced in meeting service needs. Where personnel are required to pay increased premiums for life insurance or the life element of personal accident insurance as a result of service, or liability for service, in the Gulf, the Ministry of Defence will meet 90 per cent. of the additional cost up to certain limits. These arrangements apply to reserve personnel who are called out as well as regulars. In addition, called-out reservists are eligible for the same generous attributable benefits of the armed forces pension scheme as are regular personnel.

Plutonium

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the research paper on the explosive properties of reactor grade plutonium prepared by Dr. J. Carson Mark, former head of the theoretical division of the Los Alamos national nuclear laboratories, for the Washington DC-based Nuclear Control Institute in August 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent studies have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received by his Department on the long-term radiological impact of United Kingdom nuclear tests conducted at the Maralinga and Emu sites in Australia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department commissioned and has recently received a copy of the National Radiological Protection Board report "Assessment of the Potential Radiological Impact of Residual Contamination in the Maralinga and Emu Areas" (NRPB-R237). This was published in November 1990 as part of the report commissioned by the Australian Government of the technical assessment group (TAG) on rehabilitation of the former United Kingdom nuclear weapon test sites in Australia.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his reply on funding of the atomic weapons establishment of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *431*, he will set out the policy considerations behind the practice of giving details of funding for the chemical defence establishment but not of funding for the atomic weapons establishment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is Government policy to make information available wherever possible without detriment to the public interest. Data on the funding of the atomic weapons establishment would, however, allow judgments to be made on the scale and scope of the United Kingdom nuclear weapons programme which it would not be in the public interest to disclose.

Iraq (Military Exports)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the value of military equipment, technology and training provided by the United Kingdom to Iraq in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 30 January, *Official Report*, Vol. 184, col. *558*.

Iraqi Detainees

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Iraqi military personnel have been detained since the outbreak of hostilities; and what they were doing in this country.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Thirty-five Iraqis known or suspected to be military personnel have been detained in this country as prisoners of war under the provisions of the third Geneva convention. All had entered the United Kingdom to study at various colleges.

Aldershot Army Base

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on retaining the British Army base at Aldershot.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Until the future size and shape of the Army has been more clearly defined, I am unable to comment on the future of particular locations.

Families for Defence

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support is provided by his Department to the organisation Families for Defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Material explaining the Government's defence policy is made available to any individual or organisation who requests it, including Families for Defence. The Ministry of Defence provides no financial support to the group.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated accumulated cost of British military action following the invasion of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The accumulated cost of the British military action following the invasion of the Falkland Islands is estimated to be about £3·5 billion at outturn prices, equivalent to £4·9 billion at 1990-91 prices.

Iraq (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ministerial visits have been made by his Department to Iraq since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been no visits by Defence Ministers to Iraq since 1979.

Training Courses

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown of the number of places on his Department's training courses allocated to students from foreign and Commonwealth countries, indicating the countries from which these students came, during each of the years 1985 to 1990 inclusive.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following countries have sent personnel for training at United Kingdom service establishments on at least one occasion during each of the years 1985 to 1990 inclusive.

Algeria
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Chad
Chile
China
Congo
Cyprus
Denmark
Djibouti
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Ivory Coast
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Lebanon

Lesotho
Luxembourg
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Somalia
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Uganda
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

The approximate numbers of United Kingdom military training courses attended by overseas students in each financial year from 1985 to 1990 are as follows:

	Number
1985-86	5,150
1986-87	5,500
1987-88	4,850
1988-89	5,150
1989-90	4,750

Further specific details about numbers trained are generally confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Government concerned.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 February 1991

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Political Science

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will include contemporary political issues in the syllabus for 14 to 16-year-olds.

Mr. Eggar: There is nothing to stop schools dealing with contemporary political issues subject to their legal duty to avoid political indoctrination and ensure that any political issues raised are given a balanced treatment of opposing views.

Special Purpose Grants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out, for the year 1991-92, the value per child *(a)* in each maintained sector school of the grants for education, support and training and *(b)* in each grant-maintained school for the special purpose grant (development).

Mr. Eggar: In 1991-92, the grant payable to local authorities under the grants for education support and training programme will represent nationally an average of some £28 per pupil in local education authority maintained schools. Special purpose grant (development) of some £41 per pupil will be available to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much grant-maintained schools have been allocated for special purpose grant for staff redundancy; how many teaching and non-teaching posts have been removed; and how many teaching and non-teaching staff have been made redundant or taken early retirement.

Mr. Eggar: Up to 31 December 1990 approval had been given for special purpose grant for restructuring (SPG(R)) to be paid in respect of 52 teachers at grant-maintained schools. No approvals have been given in respect of non-teaching staff. Of the 52 teachers three received redundancy payments at a total cost of £29,800. A further three received voluntary severance terms at a total cost of £25,900. The remaining 46 teachers and the three receiving redundancy payments have received or will be receiving premature retirement compensation.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any changes to announce to cash limits on votes within his responsibility for 1990-91; and whether there are any proposals to amend his Department's running cost limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to parliamentary approval to the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class XI, vote 1, schools, research and miscellaneous services, and class XI, vote 2, higher and further education will be amended. The Department's running cost limit on class XI, vote 4 will also be increased. The cash limit changes are as follows:

Class and vote	*Current cash limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised cash limit* £
XI.1	657,650,000	−1,500,000	656,150,000
XI.2	3,115,983,000	+1,500,000	3,117,483,000

The decrease on class XI, vote 1 results from slippage of certain projects in connection with research, development and implementation of the national curriculum. The token supplementary estimate also takes account of a transfer of provision for grant-in-aid to the Sports Council from the Department of the Environment to my Department.

The increase on class XI, vote 2 is needed to offset reduced receipts to be appropriated in aid of the vote from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man for students attending higher education institutions in the United Kingdom; from the sale of property owned by the Royal College of Art to be reinvested in the college's redevelopment scheme; and from a decline in the proportion of Open university students from Northern Ireland. It also provides additional recurrent funds for the Royal College of Art to pay the rent on temporary accommodation for the school of painting following its move from a building owned by the Victoria and Albert museum.

My Department's running cost limit will be increased by £193,000 from £80,686,000 to £80,879,000.

These changes are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Know-how Funds

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North regarding access to the know-how fund for local education authorities.

Mrs. Chalker: I replied to the hon. Gentleman's letter of 17 January on 31 January.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the joint assistance unit expects to meet the British Council to discuss the Brackenhurst college submission for support from the know-how fund.

Mrs. Chalker: I am writing to the hon. Member about this case.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in full the current disbursements under the Polish know-how fund.

Mrs. Chalker: The list of activities and their estimated expenditure which are being supported in 1990-91 from the Poland know-how fund is as follows:

Know-How Fund, Poland: Projects being funded 1990/91

Aid Vote Projects	*Anticipated Expenditure* £'000
Banking and Finance	
Foreign Investment Agency	357·0
Privatisation Consultancies	1,690·0
Privatisation Foundation	112·0
Gdansk Research Centre	32·0
Gdansk Economic Foundation	4·0
Export Development Bank	200·0
Advanced Corporate Finance	15·0
Diagnostic Studies for Banks	200·0
Conference on Demonopolisation	11·3
Financial Seminars	4·0
New Banks – Unity Trust plc	30·0
National Banks of Poland – Lawyers	2·0
Insurance Regulators	6·0
Insurance Seminar	10·0
Insurance Consultancy	300·0
Assets and Liabilities	30·0
Stock Exchange Training	70·0
Total	3073·3
Management and Accountancy	
Accountancy Project Identification Mission (PIM)	14·3
Accountancy Training Project	109·0
Assistance with Auditing	250·0
Management Project Identification	42·0
Industrial Attachments	300·0
Management Educators	25·0
Regional Management Centres	170·0
Shipping Management	20·0
Total	930·3
Macroeconomic advice	
Computer Education	8·0
Ministry of Planning—Initial	27·0
Ministry of Planning—Follow-up	70·0
Industrial Competitiveness Research	27·0
Advice to Ministry of Finance	202·0
Total	334·0
Natural resources	
Section Project Identification Mission (PIM)	5·0
PIM Follow-up	15·0
Agros Vegetable Study	55·0
Krakow Vets Training	42·0
Seeds Sector Training	55·0
Total	172·0
Industry	
Vehicle Productivity Study—Phase I	44·3
Phase II	123·4
UNIDO Projects	200·0
National Business Services	9·0
Company Doctor Training	431·0
Industrial Restructuring	122·0
Industrial Competitiveness	27·0
Total	956·7
Energy	
Electric Utility	403·0
UNDP/World Bank Studies	
Hard Coal	339·0
Oil and Gas	339·0
Lignite and Electricity	409·0
Gas Pricing	156·0
Coal Industry Training (United Kingdom)	130·0
Pilot Course (Poland)	10·5
Coal Industry Training (Poland)	45·0
Total	1,831·5
Education and ELT	
Distance Education	23·6
Access to English	319·2
English for Management	300·0
VSO Teachers (English Language Lecturers)	154·0
Equipment for Education Ministry	50·0
Academic Links Programme	185·0
Training Awards Programme	118·0
Study Tour (Technical Education)	15·0
Book Sector Study	29·0
Total	1,193·8
Environment	
Assistance to Ministry of Environment	20·0
Carlisle/Slupsk-River Pollution Advice	30·0
Total	50·0
Local Government	
Equipment Supply	20·0
Department of Environment Mission	8·0
Training of Trainers	186·0
Foundation for local Democracy	7·0
Local Government Seminars	12·0
Training Needs Analysis	5·0
Total	238·0
Employment	
Employment: Sector PIM	5·0
Health and Safety	
Employment Services	
Training	125·0
Small Firms	
Total	130·0
Planning	
Urban Planning	30·0
Aid Co-ordination Adviser	17·5
Ministry of Physical Planning	26·8
Total	74·3
Telecommunications	
Telecommunications	40·0
Total	40·0
Railways	
Polish Railways Management	150·0
Railways Signalling Training	15·8
Total	165·8
Tourism	
Cracow Tourism Study	20·5
Total	20·5
Health	
Blood Plasma Study	49·0
Healthcare	17·0

	£'000
AIDS Education	47·6
Pharmacy Training	4·2
Eurohealth Conference—Wroclaw	11·0
Total	128·8
Police	
Police Training	30·0
Total	30·0
Joint Ventures	
British Airports Authority	41·0
Simon Storage Gp Ltd.	12·5
COMTEC	3·0
Pilotweld	21·0
Total	77·5
BESO	
Fact Finding Mission	3·0
Total	3·0
AID Vote Total	8,563·8
Political Legal and Other	
British/Polish Legal Seminars	30·0
British/Polish Round Table	10·0
Placement of Polish Lawyers	40·0
British/Polish Commercial Law	31·5
Book Industry Training—Stage I	70·0
Book Industry Training—Stage II	51·0
Journalists—British Council/Thomson Foundation	120·0
Customs Assistance	3·0
Western Press	20·0
Tweedale Press Group	20·0
Photography—Delta Images	2·8
Trade Union Trading—Gdansk	2·7
Financial Journalists	15·0
OECD Contribution	125·0
Civics Education	1·0
Police	4·5
Ealing Language Courses	45·0
Restructuring Polish TV	3·0
World Service/Media	190·0
Cambridge University Seminar	1·2
Association of Countryside Rangers	10·0
Lecture Tour (Legal)	1·0
Warsaw School of Planning (Books)	5·0
Broadcasting	2·0
Jagiellonian Trust Seminars	16·0
Social Security Advice	3·0
Training Polish Diplomats	53·2
Information and Printing Technology Seminars	8·0
Polish Publishing House	15·0
Education for Democracy Textbook	4·0
Publishing Sales and Marketing Consultancy	5·7
Political Legal and other Total	908·6
GRAND TOTAL	9,472·4

Cash Limits

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of Strate for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1990-91 cash limit for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the overseas aid vote (class II, vote 5) will be increased by £1,444,000 from £1,477,509,000 to £1,478,953,000. The increase reflects adjustments to the aid programme including a contribution from the Scottish Office to the costs of the St. Helena ship. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Commonwealth Foundation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Commonwealth Foundation on its activities for 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is represented on the board of governors of the Commonwealth Foundation by the British governor, Dr. John Wood. The board meets regularly to establish the foundation's policy and future activities.

Reforming European Economies

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his overall strategic approach to aid and assistance to the reforming east European and central European economies.

Mrs. Chalker: The main strategic aid is to help in the establishment of a plural democracy and to facilitate the transition from a centrally planned to a free market economy. The know-how fund is our main bilateral instrument for achieving these overall aims. Assistance under the know-how fund is concentrated on help in the financial sector, particularly privatisation, banking and accountancy; in the employment sector; in the development of small businesses; in management training; and in assistance to parliamentarians, the media and legal structures.

ENERGY

Mine Workings

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the findings of the Government-commissioned Harris research survey into attitudes to British Coal's arrangements for the notification of past and proposed mine workings; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon.Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), on 20 April 1990 at column *1035*.

British Coal intends to introduce on a voluntary basis in February a pilot scheme for individually notifying householders that their property might be affected by subsidence damage as a result of underground mining operations. The intention is that these arrangements will be introduced nationally from June. The recently published Coal Mining Subsidence Bill, once enacted, will make the individual notification of householders a statutory requirement.

Cash Limits

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class V, vote 2 will be increased by £27,033,000 from £298,562,000 to £325,595,000. This extra provision sought includes £27,141,000 for UKAEA programmes mainly for additional requirements on decommissioning and radioactive waste management operations, together with restructuring costs related to the thermal reactor safety programme and to the closure of the Winfrith reactor. Extra provision of £3,700,000 to meet an increased contribution towards British Coal's topping cycle project and £34,000 to cover residual Oil Pipelines Agency costs is also required. The increases sought will be partially offset by savings of £3,842,000 on class V, vote 2.

The cash limit for class V, vote 3 will be increased by £586,000 from £40,117,000 to £40,703,000. This extra provision is sought to meet an increase of £655,000 on the running costs limit (from £41,970,000 to £42,625,000), including additional costs arising from the implementation of the report of the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster; £81,000 for additional information technology requirements; and £20,000 for increased costs in connection with the Ocean Odyssey fatal accident inquiry. The increases sought will be partially offset by savings of £120,000 together with an increase of £50,000 in appropriations in aid on class V, vote 3.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Geothermal Hot Dry Rock Technology

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he intends to end the research programme into geothermal hot dry rock technology.

Mr. Moynihan: No, the current phase of work on hot dry rock technology is due to be completed in September 1991. My Department has undertaken a thorough review of the technology with substantial input from the contractors for the present programme, Camborne school of mines (CSM), the RTZ Consultants Limited (RTZC). This has shown that very substantial uncertainties remain about the practicality of extracting energy from hot dry rocks within the United Kingdom and, although the economics are very uncertain, the technology seems unlikely to be competitive with conventional means of generation in the short to medium term.

In the light of this I have concluded that a new direction rather than closure of the programme is needed. The next phase of work (expected to be carried out by CSM and its associates, and RTZC), for which £3·3 million will be provided over the period 1 October 1991 to 31 March 1994, will concentrate less on research in Cornwall and involve greater collaboration with a European programme now under way involving France, Germany and the European Commission. In this way the substantial expertise developed in the United Kingdom can be exploited in a European context and opportunities pursued for transferring the technology to industry. A decision on further major investment in an experimental prototype will be taken in about two years when feasibility work on the different European sites has been completed.

WALES

Births

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many babies were born in Wales in 1990; and what were the corresponding figures for the last 10 years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information for 1990 is not yet available. The available information is given in the following table:

Babies Born in NHS Hospitals in Wales
(Live and Still Births)

Year	*Number*
1979	34,636
1980	35,741
1981	34,445
1982	34,019
1983	33,998
1984	34,528
1985	35,302
1986	35,552
1987	36,338
1988	37,376
1989	36,713

Welsh Food

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the reasons for his decision to set up the Welsh food promotion to begin operation on 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: While many organisations are involved in the marketing of Welsh food, I was concerned that no single body was in a position to assume a clear lead role and to co-ordinate our efforts.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to promote Welsh food abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: One of the objectives of Welsh Food Promotions Ltd. will be to co-ordinate marketing efforts at home and abroad. I expect the company to work closely with Food From Britain and with other bodies that are engaged in that task.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed in the manufacture of Welsh food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Estimates obtained from the 1987 census of employment indicate that, in Wales, there were 18·4 thousand employees employed in the manufacture of food (standard industrial classification 1980 groups 411 to 423).

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any changes to his Department's cash limits for 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. The cash limit for class XVI, vote 2 is to be reduced by £1,400,000 from £98,998,000 to £97,598,000. This reduction takes account of lower than expected demand for regional enterprise grants and will offset the spring supplementary estimate being sought for class XVI, vote 1 in respect of agricultural grants.

The cash limit for class XVI, vote 5 is to be reduced by £2,987,000 from £325,411,000 to £322,424,000, to offset the following increases:

The WO/UA cash limit will be increased by £2 million from £69,904,000 to £71,904,000 in respect of additional provision for Cardiff Bay development corporation to facilitate additional land acquisition and relocation costs.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, there will be an increase of £145,000 in the provision for class XVI, vote 12 in respect of rate rebates for the disabled.

A sum of £842,000 is being transferred to the Office of Arts and Libraries to cover a payment of that amount to the Welsh National Opera company.

All these changes are within the forecast outturn for the overall planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the autumn statement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Continuous Stationery plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will investigate the compliance by Continuous Stationery plc with paragraphs 50(2) and 50(4) of schedules 4 and 5 of the Companies Act 1985, concerning contingent liabilities, in respect of its most recent published accounts.

Mr. Redwood: If the hon. Member cares to write to me with details of the reasons why he believes the accounts in question warrant investigation, I shall be pleased to consider the matter.

Lyons Maid

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to refer any takeover bid for Lyons Maid by Unilever to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Redwood: If such an offer is made it will be considered by the Director General of Fair Trading under the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to determine whether it qualifies for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. If it does qualify the Director General will advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the question of reference. Each case is considered by the Director General and my right hon. Friend on its merits. The main criterion for my right hon. Friend in deciding whether or not to make a reference remains the possible effect of a merger on competition in the United Kingdom.

Cash Limits

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash and running cost limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Lilley: The cash limit for class IV, vote 2 (support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection, and administration) will be reduced by £11,308,000 from £801,681,000 to £790,373,000. The running costs limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be reduced by £3,024,000 from £303,764,000 to £300,740,000.

The reduction in the cash limit covers a reduction of £7,958,000 in grant-in-aid external finance provision for the English Industrial Estates Corporation from £24,758,000 to £16,800,000 reflecting current conditions in the property market, and a reduction of £350,000 for the Government's contribution to a rent subsidy for the International Sugar and Wheat Organisation following the transfer of responsibility to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (class III, vote 4).

The reduction in the running cost limit is due principally to lower-than-expected costs for the restructuring of the National Engineering Laboratory. It also reflects some savings resulting from the reorganisation of certain headquarters divisions announced by my predecessor to the House of Commons on 21 February 1990, *Official Report*, columns *791-92*, and £24,000 in respect of the transfer of some functions from gross running cost control areas to those exempt from gross running cost control.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much stock will be put into the public auction of the Crown Suppliers' ex-stock; and if it will include office and domestic furniture.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

All remaining stock, including new office furniture and fitments, domestic and commercial furniture and household goods.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date a public auction of the Crown Suppliers' ex-stock will be held in the current year.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The dates are 14 and 15 February 1991.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the estimated value of the Crown Suppliers' ex-stock to be put into a forthcoming public auction.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The figure is between £3 million and £3·5 million at cost price.

Personal Debt

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest estimates of serious personal over-indebtedness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: There is no generally agreed definition of "serious personal over-indebtedness". However, the Policy Studies Institute in its report "Credit and Debt in Britain" which was published in February 1990 estimated that about 3 per cent. of all households (560,000) had serious debts.

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those measures of assistance to firms under the enterprise initiative which are directed on a regional basis and the regions in which they are currently available;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* those criteria by which firms in the south-east region of England are excluded from measures of assistance under the enterprise initiative;

(3) if he will consider making all measures of assistance to firms under the enterprise initiative available throughout the United Kingdom without regional distinction.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 January 1991]:* Under the enterprise initiative, there are three measures of assistance which are directed on a regional basis:

Regional selective assistance—available in the assisted areas of Great Britain;

Regional enterprise grants—available in development areas of Great Britain and the intermediate areas of South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Plymouth and Fife;

The consultancy initiatives—available throughout Great Britain but at a higher rate in assisted areas and urban programme areas.

The only forms of help under the enterprise initiative not available anywhere in the south-east are regional selective assistance and regional enterprise grants. In urban programme areas in the south-east firms can benefit from higher rates of support under the consultancy initiatives.

A wide range of criteria were used in drawing up the current assisted areas map, including unemployment, long-term unemployment, industrial and occupational structure, population density and remoteness from main markets. No areas in the south-east were judged to warrant assisted area status. The designation of urban programme areas is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

We have no intention of extending to the whole of the United Kingdom the additional help available regionally. The Government seek to promote enterprise and growth throughout the country as a whole but within this framework, extra help is needed in certain areas.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mining Subsidence

Mr. Barron: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases in respect of mining subsidence damage were referred to the Lands Tribunal in each of the last five years; and how long each took to be resolved.

The Attorney-General: The number of cases in respect of mining subsidence damage referred to the Lands Tribunal in each of the last five years is given in the table.

Year	*Number of cases*
1986	23
1987	68
1988	34
1989	26
1990	8

The Lord Chancellor's Department does not keep detailed statistics on the length of time taken to resolve mining subsidence damage cases, but it is estimated that cases are resolved within 12 to 18 months, depending on the length of time it takes the parties to prepare for the hearing.

Entry Clearance Officers

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Attorney-General what qualifications or training *(a)* entry clearance officers and *(b)* adjudicators have in order to qualify them for the work they carry out in the Indian sub-continent; how many entry clearance officers and adjudicators are employed; what is the average number of applications dealt with by an entry clearance officer or an adjudicator each month; and to whom they are answerable for the manner in which they perform their duties.

The Attorney-General: The training of entry clearance officers is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I understand that entry clearance officers on the Indian sub-continent undergo a three-and-a-half week training course in which they are instructed in all areas of the immigration rules. On arrival at post they are given a further period of training varying between two and eight weeks depending on their location. All aspects of their work are closely monitored by line managers, to whom they are immediately answerable. Their ultimate responsibility is to their head of post. There are 82 entry clearance officers on the Indian sub-continent, who each process an average of 320 applications per month.

Adjudicators are appointed by the Lord Chancellor from among lawyers of not less than seven years' standing. Upon appointment, adjudicators are required to attend a two to three-day induction course, to pay visits to officials of the immigration service at ports of entry in the United Kingdom, and to officials of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, which represents 50 per cent. of appellants before the adjudicators. Once the adjudicators take up their duties they are required to attend training seminars, which are held on a regular basis.

The number of adjudicators currently sitting at nine hearing centres throughout the United Kingdom is as follows:

1 Chief Adjudicator
11 Full-time Adjudicators
71 Part-time Adjudicators

There are no details of the number of cases from the Indian sub-continent disposed of by individual adjudicators, but in 1990 the average number of cases disposed of each month was 1,377.

Adjudicators are answerable to the chief adjudicator and the Lord Chancellor for their conduct. Appellants dissatisfied with a judicial decision of an adjudicator may appeal on a point of law to the immigration appeal tribunal.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Attorney-General what discretion is available to Ministers to bring forward the timing of the hearing of an appeal against the refusal of an entry permit by an entry clearance officer in the Indian sub-continent; and whether he has discretion to intervene in cases where evidence of an unsound refusal is made available to him.

The Attorney-General: Ministers have no discretion to being forward the timing of immigration appeal hearings by the adjudicators. That is a matter for the immigration appellate authorities, which are independent of Ministers, although responsibility for their administration rests with the Lord Chancellor.

Where further evidence clearly indicates that a decision to refuse entry is unsound, the correspondence unit in the migration and visa department of the Foreign Office will refer the case back to the entry clearance officer for reconsideration.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average time in the Indian sub-continent that elapses

between the lodging of an appeal against the decision of an entry clearance officer to grant an entry permit and the hearing of that appeal by an adjudicator; and what are the minimum and maximum times recorded during the past two years.

The Attorney-General: The immigration appellate authorities (IAA) do not record details of the minimum and maximum times for appeals from an Indian sub-continent to be determined by adjudicators. However, it is possible to provide an estimate of the average time taken by the IAA to deal with appeals at each stage of the proceedings, as follows:

(a) From the date of receipt of the notice of appeal and explanatory statement at the IAA's headquarters in London, to the date the case papers are despatched to the parties representatives in this country: 10 to 12 weeks;
(b) From the date on which both parties indicate readiness to proceed to a hearing, to the date of the hearing: two to three months;
(c) From the date of the hearing to the date the Adjudicator's determination is despatched to the parties representatives in this country: one month.

Thus the current estimate of the average time taken by an Adjudicator to deal with a case is five and a half to seven months, to which must be added the time taken by the parties' representatives in the United Kingdom to indicate readiness to proceed after receipt of the case papers from the IAA. This latter period can vary considerably but the current estimate is from two to six months.

In addition, an appeal from a determination by an adjudicator to the immigration appeal tribunal is estimated to take four to six months.

Cash Limits

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Lord Chancellor's Department's cash limit and running costs limit for 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: Yes, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Lord Chancellor's Department, class X, vote 1 will be increased by £2,716,000 from £321,132,000 to £323,848,000.

The supplementary estimate gives effect to an increase of £2,472,000 in the Department's provision for the 1990-91 accommodation charge. The increase arises from the introduction of value added tax on commercial rents.

The supplementary estimate also gives effect to an increase of £254,000 in the Department's provision for estate management which arises from the introduction of value added tax on commercial use of fuel and utilities.

The increase to appropriations in aid of £10,000 is required to give effect to receipts in respect of nursery facilities.

The running costs limit for class X, vote 1 will be increased by £2,726,000 from £280,982,000 to £283,708,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Crown prosecution service's cash limit and running costs limit for 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class x, vote 5 will be increased by £3,000,000 from £130,668,000 to £133,668,000. Within this total the Department's running costs limit will be increased by £4,000,000 from £125,107,000 to £129,107,000.

Additional provision is required to enable the Crown prosecution service to meet increased accommodation costs, mostly caused by rent reviews and essential office moves, and the costs of agency support staff to compensate for shortfalls in recruitment particularly in the south-east. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Treasury Solicitor's Department's cash limit and running costs limit for 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 9 will be increased by £249,000 from £15,862,000 to £16,111,000. The additional provision is required for capital expenditure for new office accommodation in Taunton and a similar sum will be deducted from the provision allocated for 1991-92.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Serious Fraud Office's cash limit and running costs limit for 1990-91.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 7 will be increased by £60,000 from £6,567,000 to £6,627,000. The Department's running costs limit will be increased by £60,000 from £6,367,000 to £6,427,000. This increase will enable the Serious Fraud Office to meet additional costs arising from a restructuring of its senior management.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of holding people in police cells, giving *(a)* the daily rate and *(b)* by police authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dogs

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of present legislation to control killer dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 increased the powers of the courts under the Dogs Act

1871, particularly as regards the destruction of dangerous dogs. The courts have already used these new powers. Last summer, the Government's consultation paper, "The Control of Dogs", reviewed the legislation on dangerous dogs and set out a number of proposals for further action. We are now considering the responses to this paper.

Glen Parva Remand Centre

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will hold an inquiry into the conditions in Glen Parva remand centre.

Mrs. Rumbold: As part of his normal programme, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons will be conducting an inspection of Her Majesty's young offender institution Glen Parva in October this year, but I see no reason for an inquiry.

Arab People (Racist Attacks)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role he is playing in co-ordinating special measures to protect Arab and Muslim people from racist attacks.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend is in close touch with representatives of different Muslim communities and with the police service. They and other agencies with responsibilities for dealing with attacks against law-abiding citizens and their homes and institutions in this country are clear about the priority such incidents deserve.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make any changes to the 1990-91 cash limits within his responsibilities and to his Department's running costs' limit.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[pursuant to my reply, 8 November 1990, column 13]:* Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class IX, vote 2, prisons, England and Wales, will be increased by £50,000,000 from £1,294,715,000 to £1,344,715,000. The additional provision is needed to meet the costs of accommodating prisoners in police cells made necessary as a result of the serious prison disorders which occurred in April 1990 and because of industrial action by prison officers. The cash limit on class IX, vote 3, Home Office administration, immigration and police support services, England and Wales, will be increased by £36,523,000 from £758,668,000 to £795,191,000. The additional provision is necessary mainly to fund grants under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 to local authorities which have to make special provision for the needs of their ethnic minority population and also to meet higher than expected costs of Home Office accommodation.

The Home Office running costs limit will be increased by £18,984,000 from £1,012,417,000 to £1,031,401,000[1].

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Furthermore, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 5 (the Charity Commission) will be increased by £221,000 from £14,302,000 to £14,523,000 and the running cost limit will be increased by £419,000 from £13,414,000 to £13,833,000. These increases are to meet the costs of the inquiry under section 6 of the Charities Act 1960 into the charity War on Want. The costs of the inquiry are being met partly by savings in capital expenditure. The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

[1] This is needed mainly for the greater than expected increase in the cost of accommodation, principally in the rents of offices in London.

ENVIRONMENT

Southampton Buildings, Holborn

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the cladding removed in 1986 from the east wing of Southampton buildings, Holborn will be replaced.

Mr. Yeo: The cladding was removed in 1986 because of serious deterioration following storm damage in that year. Re-cladding was planned to start in December 1989, but this had to be postponed because of funding difficulties and other maintenance priorities. It is unlikely that the position will change during 1991-92, but I can assure the hon. Member that there has been no significant deterioration to the fabric of the building. Periodic inspections will be carried out and the position kept under review.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals exist for Southampton buildings, Holborn, when the Patent Office and British Library vacate the buildings; and if there are any plans to develop the site.

Mr. Yeo: The Patent Office now occupies only a small part of Southampton buildings, having vacated most of its accommodation there in September 1989. The building is expected to be occupied by British Library and others until the mid-1990s, when the opportunity may occur for refurbishment or redevelopment. It is too early to say which option might be adopted.

Disused Barns

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest guidance provided by his Department to local authorities over planning permission for the conversion of disused barns into *(a)* dwellings and *(b)* workshops or other use.

Mr. Yeo: DOE circular 8/87, "Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas—Policy and Procedures", states that, finding new uses for buildings such as barns which play an important part in the history and appearance of the countryside, all possible solutions should be explored. It points out that they can make a contribution to the rural economy by providing employment. My Department also provided guidance on the re-use of redundant rural buildings in 1988 in planning policy guidance note 7 (PPG7) on "Rural Enterprise and Development" and PPG2 on "Green Belts". A draft revision of PPG7 was issued for public consultation in December 1989.

Land Compensation Act 1973

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the Land Compensation Act 1973; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Planning and Compensation Bill, introduced in another place, contains a number of major proposals for change to land compensation legislation. These include in particular a substantial widening of eligibility for home loss payments under the 1973 Act and an increase in the level of such payments for owner-occupiers.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table indicating the number of jobs created in each urban development corporation area.

Mr. Portillo: The totals of permanent jobs created or attracted, net of losses, are given in the table:

UDC	*Net gain in jobs to March 1990*
Black Country	5,734
Bristol	0
Central Manchester	285
Leeds	5,241
London Docklands	29,000
Merseyside	4,200
Sheffield	40
Teesside	2,741
Trafford Park	2,450
Tyne and Wear	1,630
Total	51,321

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of financial resources allocated to *(a)* the urban programme, *(b)* urban development corporations and *(c)* grants for urban development for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* The breakdown of central Government expenditure on the urban programme, urban development corporations and city grant (including urban development grant and urban regeneration grant) for 1986-87 to 1990-91 is as follows:

£ million

	1986-87 outturn	*1987-88 outturn*	*1988-89 outturn*	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 forecast outturn*
Urban Programme[1]	236·7	245·6	229·0	226·0	232·6
Urban Development Corporations (EFLs)	89·3	133·5	234·4	436·0	553·9
City Grants	23·9	26·8	27·8	39·1	50·6

[1] Includes contributions from DH, DES and DTp but excludes contributions for District Health Authorities.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the number of schemes in any urban programme operating at the present time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Local authorities decide on the number of schemes in their annual urban programmes, according to local priority. The Secretary of State has no present plans to review the list of urban programme authorities.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his current priorities in urban regeneration.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Good progress has already been made on improving the quality of life for people in our inner cities: we aim now to build on that success, working with local government and the private and voluntary sectors.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the standard spending assessment for Stoke-on-Trent and the 10 district authorities closest to it in size, giving figures for five larger ones and five smaller ones, together with the estimated assessment for each, and the percentage increase or decrease in the final figure compared with the estimate for each; and if he will list the criteria which led to changes in the original estimates.

Mr. Portillo: The table lists the standard spending assessment (SSA) for Stoke-on-Trent and the 10 districts closest in size in terms of 1991-92 SSA in £m. The main reasons for change between the provisional figures for 1991-92 SSAs announced on 31 October and the final settlement figures are: that later estimates of credit approvals have been used; that later data on flood defence expenditure have been incorporated; and there have been a number of other small changes to data and service control totals. These effects are shown in columns 5, 6 and 7 respectively of the table.

1991-92 Standard spending assessments

	31 October figure for total SSA £ million	*Final figure for total SSA £ million*	*Percentage change in total SSA per cent.*	*Change in total SSA £ million*	*Change in capital financing SSA element £ million*	*Change in flood defence SSA element £ million*	*Change in all other SSA elements £ million*
Bristol	40·872	41·098	0·6	0·226	0·089	0·132	0·004
Nottingham	37·162	37·138	−0·1	−0·024	−0·035	—	0·011
Kingston upon Hull	31·210	31·419	0·7	0·210	0·206	−0·002	0·006
Plymouth	28·678	28·666	0·0	−0·012	−0·012	−0·030	0·006
Portsmouth	24·505	24·729	0·9	0·223	0·236	−0·018	0·005
Stoke-on-Trent	24·880	24·470	−1·6	−0·410	−0·407	−0·008	0·005
Derby	24·365	24·313	−0·2	−0·051	−0·056	0·000	0·005
Southampton	23·370	23·351	−0·1	−0·020	−0·024	—	0·005
Luton	22·175	22·230	0·2	0·055	0·051	—	0·004

	31 October figure for total SSA £ million	Final figure for total SSA £ million	Percentage change in total SSA per cent.	Change in total SSA £ million	Change in capital financing SSA element £ million	Change in flood defence SSA element £ million	Change in all other SSA elements £ million
Blackburn	19·100	19·183	0·4	0·083	0·080	0·000	0·003
Brighton	18·215	18·329	0·6	0·114	0·113	—	0·001

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much it would cost to exempt all those people on income support from paying 20 per cent. of the poll tax.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

Income-related benefit levels were adjusted in April 1989 to include help towards the 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge at an estimated cost of £500 million.

Assuming that these benefit levels are not reduced, exempting all those on income support from paying the 20 per cent. contribution would cost an estimated £300 million in community charge benefit, at current benefit levels.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1985-86-87 Family Expenditure Surveys.

ID Investment Development AG

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply on 28 January, what information he has on the connections between ID Investment Development AG to which Heveningham hall was sold and representatives of the Iraqi Government.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no evidence that any such connections exist.

Employment (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the final report of the research project by Victor Hausner and Associates into the use of the urban programme in creating employment opportunities for black and ethnic minority communities in the inner cities; and whether he will put a copy of this report in the Libary.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has not yet received the final report of this research project.

Cash Limits

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 running costs limit for Ordnance Survey.

Mr. Baldry: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary token spring supplementary estimate, the running costs limit for Ordnance Survey will be increased by £650,000 from £57,193,000 to £57,843,000. The increase is needed to fund additional expenditure in a number of areas.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any changes to announce to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(i) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 5 (central environmental services, etc.) will be reduced by £145,000 from £366,400,000 to £366,255,000. There will be a corresponding increase on class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: administration) to provide for administrative expenditure incurred in setting up the Nature Conservancy Council (England).

(ii) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: administration) will be increased by £52,000 from £157,750,000 to £157,802,000. This includes a transfer of £145,000 from class VIII, vote 5 (central environmental services) for expenditure incurred in setting up the Nature Conservancy Council (England). A transfer of £13,000 is being made to the Department of Transport to support a review of first aid arrangements. Further income of £80,000 will accrue to the Building Research Establishment as a result of Property Holdings being charged the full economic cost of services provided to it.

(iii) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 2 (miscellaneous housing administration and grants) will be reduced by £1,000,000 from £110,217,000 to £109,217,000, to reflect a reduction in the level of claims by local authorities for reimbursement of costs incurred on the rent officer service, and a small reduction to the provision for grants for tenant participation schemes.

(iv) The non-voted cash limit for DOE/UA (urban aid and derelict land reclamation) will be increased by £3,675,000 from £904,666,000 to £908,341,000. This is to cover increased grant-in-aid of £3,675,000 to the Bristol development corporation for land acquisitions in connection with the Bristol spine road. This will be offset by a corresponding reduction in the Department of Transport's cash limit for class VII, vote 1. Teesside development corporation will receive further provision of £4,800,000 fully offset by a corresponding decrease in grant-in-aid to Trafford Park development corporation. The provision for the city grant has also been increased by £1,122,000 to meet the higher-than-expected level of claims. There are offsetting savings of £500,000 from the recovery of derelict land grant and £622,000 from a reduction in expected claims for urban development grant.

(v) The non-voted cash limit for DOE/LACAP (local authority capital grants and credit approvals) will be reduced by £27,890,000 from £2,813,060,000 to £2,785,170,000. This provides offsetting savings for spending on specified housing grants not at present included in the cash limit, a transfer of resources to the Department of Social Security and to cover an increase in new towns housing subsidy.

(vi) the running costs limit for the Department of the Environment will be reduced by £13,000 from £157,754,000 to £157,741,000.

(vii) These changes are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limit on the Property Services Agency services vote in 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: Yes, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 13 will be increased by £15,548,000 from £29,658,000 to £45,206,000. This increase is required to

finance additional expenditure on severance payments to surplus staff as a result of the restructuring of PSA Services into a viable commercial proposition, and to finance additional and unforseen expenditure on the dilapidation costs relating to the early surrender of a leased property no longer required for use by Government Departments. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the autumn statement.

Inner-city Decay

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of expenditure by his Department to tackle inner-city decay for each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* My Department supports a wide range of programmes within the Government's current initiatives for the inner cities. Resources for these programmes totalled some £1·3 billion in 1988-89 and £1·4 billion in 1989-90; expenditure during 1990-91 is expected to exceed £1·5 billion.

Global Warming

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the report of the German parliamentary commission on preventive measures to protect the earth's atmosphere chaired by Bernd Schmidbaver in 1987 to 1989; and what arrangements are in place to obtain for his Department copies of reports produced by Parliaments of European Community member states on global warming and greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Copies of the German parliamentary commission's report have been obtained by the Department. We receive such reports through British embassies in other member states and through direct contacts with the Governments of member states.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Local Authority Statistics

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was was *(a)* the estimated population, *(b)* the estimated electorate and *(c)* the estimated total net valuation in each of the past five years for each of the 26 local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Estimated Population

Local authority	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Antrim	45,900	45,900	46,600	47,700	48,100
Ards	62,200	63,000	63,600	64,000	64,500
Armagh	50,400	51,200	50,700	49,200	49,000
Ballymena	55,800	55,800	56,100	56,900	57,200
Ballymoney	23,800	23,800	23,800	23,900	23,900
Banbridge	31,600	31,700	32,000	31,900	31,900
Belfast	301,600	303,600	303,800	299,600	296,900
Carrickfergus	28,400	29,000	29,300	30,000	30,400
Castlereagh	58,400	58,000	57,900	58,000	58,000
Coleraine	47,300	47,600	47,700	48,100	48,500
Cookstown	27,900	27,800	27,700	27,600	27,600
Craigavon	75,300	76,100	76,600	77,200	77,700
Derry	95,300	95,700	97,500	98,700	99,500
Down	55,400	55,800	56,400	57,000	57,200
Dungannon	43,900	43,800	43,900	43,700	43,700
Fermanagh	51,400	51,000	50,300	50,000	50,400
Larne	28,600	28,600	28,700	29,000	29,100
Limavady	28,900	29,100	29,600	30,000	29,800
Lisburn	90,900	91,900	92,900	95,500	97,400
Magherafelt	33,000	33,200	33,300	33,100	32,900
Moyle	15,000	15,100	15,200	15,200	15,100
Newry and Mourne	84,700	86,100	87,100	87,800	88,900
Newtownabbey	72,100	72,200	72,300	72,800	72,900
North Down	69,300	69,800	70,700	71,100	71,900
Omagh	44,900	54,100	45,800	44,900	44,900
Strabane	35,800	35,900	35,700	35,200	35,600
Totals	1,557,800	1,566,800	1,575,200	1,578,100	1,583,000

Figures for 1990 will not be available until mid-1991.

Estimated Electorate

Local Authority	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Antrim	27,131	27,572	27,834	29,054	29,669
Ards	44,288	45,266	45,669	46,571	47,697
Armagh	34,979	35,417	35,181	35,195	35,776
Ballymena	39,020	39,304	39,611	40,769	41,619
Ballymoney	16,499	16,685	16,665	17,072	17,396
Banbridge	23,322	23,600	23,782	24,080	24,537
Belfast	216,772	220,326	218,611	214,065	214,158
Carrickfergus	21,073	21,627	21,858	22,816	23,554

Local Authority	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Castlereagh	45,580	46,005	46,052	46,739	47,435
Coleraine	33,960	34,623	34,897	35,697	36,717
Cookstown	20,433	20,551	20,757	20,830	21,254
Craigavon	51,293	51,716	51,552	52,764	53,657
Derry	57,809	58,310	59,862	60,423	61,999
Down	36,867	37,269	37,735	38,697	39,440
Dungannon	30,906	30,991	31,269	31,270	31,919
Fermanagh	38,052	37,868	37,495	37,300	38,615
Larne	20,926	21,295	21,303	21,794	22,184
Limavady	17,292	17,514	18,369	18,534	18,739
Lisburn	60,660	61,551	62,627	65,490	67,825
Magherafelt	23,867	24,378	24,662	24,664	25,028
Moyle	10,135	10,210	10,289	10,404	10,546
Newry and Mourne	53,542	54,709	54,763	55,980	57,387
Newtownabbey	52,249	52,718	52,751	53,674	54,577
North Down	49,299	50,089	50,833	51,660	53,224
Omagh	29,550	29,884	29,992	29,933	30,410
Strabane	23,578	24,023	24,062	23,975	25,233
TOTALS	1,079,082	1,093,501	1,098,481	1,109,450	1,130,595

Total non-exempt net annual value

Local authority	1985-86 (£)	1986-87 (£)	1987-88 (£)	1988-89 (£)	1989-90 (£)
Antrim	5,830,012	5,994,112	6,187,649	6,513,335	6,570,755
Ards	6,763,974	6,924,571	7,005,564	7,180,240	7,321,190
Armagh	4,271,435	4,488,904	4,563,290	4,677,142	4,747,395
Ballymena	7,039,259	7,228,749	7,379,867	7,534,520	7,684,498
Ballymoney	2,198,716	2,275,208	2,341,678	2,396,412	2,427,267
Banbridge	3,018,341	3,147,404	3,222,734	3,316,300	3,390,459
Belfast	48,306,943	49,953,444	50,605,570	51,043,470	51,732,828
Carrickfergus	4,119,067	4,258,133	4,357,282	4,535,074	4,684,614
Castlereagh	6,946,923	7,139,971	7,294,741	7,408,177	7,649,732
Coleraine	6,715,965	6,886,587	7,015,869	7,213,131	7,385,174
Cookstown	2,588,584	2,674,125	2,766,598	2,835,745	2,905,501
Craigavon	9,128,023	9,636,690	9,753,690	9,903,051	10,035,007
Derry	10,292,053	10,496,041	10,713,397	10,910,232	11,126,709
Down	5,033,246	5,133,055	5,256,985	5,420,047	5,588,768
Dungannon	3,760,555	3,917,281	4,026,362	4,153,398	4,240,870
Fermanagh	4,308,166	4,544,234	4,667,363	4,770,953	4,938,799
Larne	3,515,785	3,608,122	3,637,364	3,699,924	3,815,754
Limavady	2,436,042	2,496,315	2,565,414	2,611,704	2,661,796
Lisburn	10,977,484	11,360,776	11,563,568	11,997,608	12,422,095
Magherafelt	2,849,759	2,974,285	3,028,959	3,127,147	3,243,890
Moyle	1,255,239	1,303,200	1,324,525	1,355,398	1,381,285
Newry & Mourne	6,577,276	6,851,324	7,121,027	7,432,529	7,673,345
Newtonabbey	10,115,650	10,377,191	10,515,650	10,639,684	10,585,369
North Down	8,207,959	8,422,604	8,537,887	8,687,086	8,835,188
Omagh	3,561,677	3,741,905	3,886,309	4,013,140	4,121,208
Strabane	2,555,439	2,656,999	2,725,852	2,818,197	2,978,889
Totals	182,373,572	188,491,230	192,065,194	196,193,644	200,148,385

Cash Limits

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running cost limits for Northern Ireland departmental services and the Northern Ireland Office in 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary associated supplementary estimates, it is proposed that the cash limit for the Northern Ireland Office (NIO1) will be increased by £16·5 million from £683·5 million to £700·0 million.

The cash limit for Northern Ireland departmental services (NID1) for 1990-91 will be decreased by £27·8 million from £2,949·3 million to £2,921·5 million. This change reflects increases in respect of VAT compensation (£1·9 million) and running costs carried over from 1989-90 under end-year flexibility arrangements (£2·2 million). It also reflects decreases in respect of transfers to the Northern Ireland Office of some £16 million and technical changes of some £16 million, the majority of which were transfers to non cash-limited areas within Northern Ireland Departments.

The running cost limit for Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be increased by £3,818,000 from £592,597,000 to £596,415,000 primarily reflecting the take-up of end-year flexibility entitlement of £2,697,000, as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, column *235-40*, and a transfer of £1,079,000 from the Department of Social Security in respect of services operated on an agency basis by the Departments of Health and Social Services. The revised running cost provision is £150,614,000 for the Northern Ireland Office and £445,801,000 for Northern Ireland Departments.

Paymaster General's Office (Cash Limits)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes are proposed to the cash and running costs limits for 1990-91 in respect of the Paymaster General's Office.

Mr. Hanley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Paymaster General's Office (class XVIII, vote 12) will be increased by £170,000 from £19,120,000 to £19,290,000 and the running cost limit by £85,000 from £17,573,000 to £17,658,000. The increases in running costs mainly reflects an increase in postal charges. The increase in cash limit also includes a reduction in receipts from the national insurance fund.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

PRIME MINISTER

Katyn Massacre

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library, copies of all official statements made or published by members of the Government on the Katyn massacre since 1 January 1961.

The Prime Minister: The information is not readily available and coud be provided only at disproportionate cost. Ministers have answered many questions in the House about the Katyn massacre. I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to him on 23 and 30 November.

"The Times" Article

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister if the article written by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for *The Times* on 17 January represented Government policy.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Conscription Forms

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to print conscription forms.

The Prime Minister: None.

Gulf Oil Slick

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the co-ordinating arrangements with the Gulf states for dealing with the Gulf oil slick.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom is maintaining close touch through diplomatic channels with the Gulf states affected, who are leading the response to the environmental damage that Iraq is inflicting on the region. The Government have responded promptly and positively to requests received from the Saudi Arabian Government for expert advice on oil pollution control and on the care of oiled birds and stand ready to respond to any further requests. The Government have stated their readiness to help to contribute to the response of the international community through such bodies as the European Communities and the United Nations Environment Programme and have called successfully in the OECD for commitment to action to improve the world's common response for the future to events of this kind.

Cabinet Office (Cash Limits)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Prime Minister, if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 running costs limit or cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services.

The Prime Minister: The running costs limit for the Cabinet Office: other services will be increased by £622,000 from £18,074,000 to £18,696,000. This increase is offset by reductions in the running costs limits of £510,000 for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, £38,000 for the Department of Trade and Industry and £74,000 for Her Majesty's Treasury and reflects the transfer of the responsibility for certain administrative functions. At the same time the cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services will be reduced by £728,000 from £21,256,000 to £20,528,000. This reflects the reprofiling of the timetable of a major capital project. Expenditure will now fall in later years.

THE ARTS

Cash Limits

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will give details of any proposed changes to the cash limits of his Department's votes in 1990-91.

Mr. Renton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit of class XIII, vote 2, is being increased from £199,025,000 to £199,867,000 to facilitate the additional provision of £842,000 to the Arts Council of Great Britain. The increase will be met by a corresponding saving on class XVI, vote 5, which is accounted for by the Welsh Office.

This change is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

Mr. Hind: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the "next steps" agencies created since 1 January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Since 1 January 1990, 24 "next steps" agencies have been established and these are listed in the table. In total 34 agencies have been set up covering some 80,000 staff. The project is continuing to make excellent progress: we expect there to be about 50 agencies by this summer and by the end of the year we expect that "next steps" will apply to about half the civil service.

Agencies established since 1 January 1990

Executive agencies	*Staff number*
Building Research Establishment	690
Central Office of Information	730
Central Veterinary Laboratory	580
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	5,450
Driving Standards Agency	2,200
Employment Service	33,500
Hydrographic Office[1]	880
Information Technology Services Agency	3,350
Insolvency Service	1,450
Intervention Board	910
Land Registry	10,400
Meteorological Office	2,250
National Engineering Laboratory	430
National Physical Laboratory	820
Natural Resources Institute	390
Occupational Health Service	100
Ordnance Survey	2,500
Patent Office	1,150
Radiocommunications Agency	500
Registers of Scotland	1,100
Royal Mint	1,050
Training and Employment Agency[2]	1,700
Vehicle Certification Agency	90
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	70
Total of 24 in number	72,290

[1] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[2] Northern Ireland Civil Service.
Figures based on Staff in Post as at 1 October 1990.

Cash Limits

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 running costs limit for the office of the Minister for the Civil Service.

Mr. Renton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the running costs limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XIX, vote 1) will be increased by £155,000 from £33,864,000 to £34,019,000. The increase will be offset by increased appropriations in aid.

The increase is required to meet increased demand for training and occupational health services provided by the Civil Service college and civil service occupational health service, respectively. The supplementary estimate includes a transfer of provision from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to reflect the transfer of responsibility for purchasing certain press summaries.

In addition, the amounts listed in the table will be transferred to the Departments and agencies shown to meet part of the cost of increased management development training under the challenge funding scheme initiated by my Department. This will be met from existing but unallocated public expenditure provision.

	£'000
Ministry of Defence	37
Department of Employment	452
Inland Revenue	182
Northern Ireland Civil Service	31
Northern Ireland Office	21
Department of Social Security	60
Department of Transport	5
Vehicle Inspectorate	2
TOTAL	790

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if receipt of disability working allowance will entitle a recipient to national insurance credits if their earnings are below the national insurance lower earnings limit.

Mr. Scott: We have given consideration to the representations that we received and have decided, exceptionally, that disability working allowance claimants will be awarded national insurance credits for periods when earnings fall below their lower earnings limit.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the change in Exchequer income during the 1991-92 financial year resulting from restoring child benefit, for all children, to its April 1987 value in real terms.

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that benefit expenditure in 1991-92 would increase by about £775 million if the level of child benefit reflected the movements in the index of retail prices which applied to the annual uprating of benefits generally from April 1988.

Income Support Deductions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on 22 October 1990, *Official Report*, column *78*, on income support deductions.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest count showed that 85 offices had income support cases with a deduction to clear community charge arrears. The number of deductions for each office is shown in the table.

Local office	*Number of deductions*
Scotland	
Aberdeen (N)	1
Airdrie	229
Ayr	383
Bathgate	67
Bellshill	887
Campbeltown	7
Clydebank	248
Coatbridge	634
Cowdenbeath	274
Cumbernauld	969
Dumbarton	511
Dumfries	1
Dundee (E)	29
Dunfermline	246
East Kilbride	154
Falkirk	824
Galashiels	493
Glasgow Anniesland	517
Glasgow Bridgeton	470
Glasgow City	245
Glasgow Cranstonhill	1
Glasgow Craigton	968
Glasgow Laurieston	733
Glasgow Maryhill	375
Glasgow Partick	264
Glasgow Provan	640
Glasgow Shettleston	786

Local office	Number of deductions
Glasgow Southside	764
Glasgow Springburn	1,006
Greenock	486
Hamilton	418
Irvine	131
Johnstone	15
Kilmarnock	536
Kirkaldy	229
Leven	39
Motherwell	839
Oban	12
Paisley	481
Perth	12
Port Glasgow	241
Stirling	1,391
Sub Total	17,556
England and Wales	
Crewe	21
Liverpool Belle-Vale	119
Liverpool Crosby	11
Liverpool Kirkby	896
Manchester Cheetham	17
St. Helens	35
Warrington	6
Berwick	15
Chester le Street	145
Gateshead	550
Goole	137
Hull (W)	28
Newcastle (W)	1
Pontefract	1
South Shields	64
Stanley	86
Stockton	1
Sunderland (N)	1
York	3
Birmingham South Yardley	21
Boston	56
Coventry (W)	32
Hereford	9
Rugby	5
Shrewsbury	2
Aberdare	17
Barry	32
Bournemouth	1
Cardiff Central	4
Cardiff (E)	1
Chippenham	12
Poole	5
Porthmadog/Dolgellau	15
Salisbury	4
Tonypandy	6
Torbay	43
Diss	2
Ashford	2
Gravesend	1
Hastings	9
Isle of Wight	8
Kingston	3
New Forest	1
New Malden	24
Tunbridge Wells	6
Sub Total	2,458
TOTAL	20,014

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received with regard to good cause backdated claiming within prescribed time for claims of the attendance or mobility component of the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: We received a large number of comments on the consultation document on disability living allowance of which only a handful commented on the issue of backdating the mobillity and care components of disability living allowance.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the temperatures used to trigger severe weather payments recorded in each of the stations relevant to the city of Nottingham for each day during the last two weeks of 1990 and those weeks in 1991 for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: A weather station will trigger if there has been a period of seven consecutive days, during which the average mean daily temperature is 0 deg C or less.

Watnall weather station, which covers the city of Nottingham, did not trigger on any day during the last two weeks of 1990, nor at any time during 1991 to date.

Full details of average mean daily temperatures recorded at all the weather stations can be found in the Library.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in table form for Nottingham and for the United Kingdom *(a)* the total number of recipients and *(b)* the total values of the payments in (i) cash and (ii) constant terms, under the exceptionally severe weather payments in each year from 1980-81 to 1990-91 under the social fund exceptionally cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

Year	*Payments nationally*	*Payments Nottingham*	*£ cash value*		*£ real value at 1990-91 prices*	
			Nationally	*Nottingham*	*Nationally*	*Nottingham*
A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*
1980-81	280,000	[1]	3,600,000	Nil	6,600,000	Nil
1981-82	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1982-83	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1983-84	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1984-85	170,000	2,108	1,700,000	19,794·25	2,400,000	20,857·80
1985-86	450,000	4,143	11,600,000	96,668·45	15,600,000	129,948·50
1986-87	2,000,000	20,247	10,200,000	101,235·00	13,300,000	131,589·50
1987-88	99,000	Nil	500,000	Nil	600,000	Nil
1988-89	502	Nil	2,510	Nil	2,884	Nil
1989-90	44,448	Nil	406,481	Nil	438,999	Nil

[1] No information available.

Note:

The variations in numbers of annual payments made can be attributed to the mild weather experienced in certain years rather than changes in criteria and legislation.

Columns B and C relate to payments made and not to the number of recipients.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in table form his Department's policy in respect of recovery of overpayment of benefit in the case of each benefit for which his Department is responsible.

Mr. Jack: Section 53 of the Social Security Act 1986 applies a common test to the recovery of overpaid social security benefits. The statutory test is whether the overpayment results from
"misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact".
The independent adjudicating authorities administer this test, deciding whether an overpayment has occurred and whether it is recoverable. If an overpayment is determined to be recoverable the Department on behalf of the Secretary of State is entitled to seek recovery.

Freephone Lines

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many freephone lines are operated by his Department; what trends are evident in the level of provision and use; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The freeline social security service provides general benefits information on 125 lines at 10 centres throughout Great Britain. The service is provided in Punjabi, Urdu and Welsh as well as English. The following specialist freeline services are also provided: social security advice line for employers; family credit freeline; Gulf crisis freeline; benefit advice line for people with disabilities.

The Department's freeline services have been regularly expanded and modernised since their 1984 launch and altogether are now taking more than 2 million calls per year. They are important and successful parts of the Department's information and advice service.

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the differences in benefits that would be payable to those involved or affected by the conflict in the Gulf if the claim arose during *(a)* an officially declared war or *(b)* in an engagement in hostilities.

Miss Widdecombe: Entitlement to war pensions and social security benefits administered by the Department is not affected by whether a claim arose during an officially declared war or in an engagement in hostilities.

Severe Disablement Premium

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the implications of the introduction of the severe disablement premium for the financial circumstances of carers who are precluded from claiming invalid care allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: The severe disability premium is intended to focus extra help on those severely disabled people who are most likely to need to buy in care, because they live alone and do not have a carer who is receiving invalid care allowance. A person receiving the severe disability premium who has a carer who is, for whatever reason, precluded from claiming invalid care allowance is, as a result of this premium, in a better position to make some payment to the carer.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of carers who are precluded from claiming invalid care allowance because the person they are caring for is in receipt of severe disablement premium.

Miss Widdecombe: None. The receipt of the severe disability premium by a disabled person does not preclude his carer from claiming invalid care allowance.

Cash Limits

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there have been any changes in the cash limits or running costs limit of his Department for 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XIV, vote 7 (administration and miscellaneous services) will be increased by £59,013,000 from £1,706,375,000 to £1,765,388,000. The revision takes account of the transfer of industrial injury benefit from the national insurance fund to the consolidated fund, as provided for in the Social Security Act 1990 (£59,000,000). In addition, running cost changes result from a transfer from the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XIX, vote 1), £60,000, a transfer to Scottish Office administration (class XV, vote 21) £42,000, and a transfer to Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3) £5,000. There is also an increase of £23,999,000 to take account of expenditure previously classified as capital now being regarded as running costs. The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

As a result of these changes the running costs limit of the Department of Social Security is increased by £24,012,000 from £1,931,176,000 to £1,955,188,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table which sets out, for a two-child family on *(a)* half, *(b)* three quarters, *(c)* full, *(d)* one and a half times, *(e)* twice, *(f)* five times and *(g)* ten times average earnings, the increase in net income to be derived from (i) a one pence cut in the standard rate of income tax in the 1991-92 financial year, (ii) an increase in personal allowances, over the above indexation, which incurred the same cost as a one pence cut in the standard rate income tax, (iii) an increase in child benefit which incurred the same cost as a one pence cut in standard rate income tax, both assuming and not assuming similar increases in the income support and family credit children's rates separately and (iv) the introduction of reduced rate tax bands of (1) 20 per cent. and (2) 15 per cent. at the same

cost as a one pence cut in standard rate income tax, showing what band of income the reduced rate would cover.

Mr. Maude: The effects of the various changes to income tax and child benefit on a married man with two children are shown in the table. In a full year each of the changes would cost about £1·95 billion which is the cost of a 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax. Estimates are based on projections of the 1988-89 survey of personal incomes in line with forecasts in the autumn statement.

Increase in income after tax[1] (£ per week) compared with indexation in 1991-92 for a married man[2] with two children

	Mulitiple of average earnings[3]						
	½	¾	*1*	1½	*2*	*5*	*10*
(i) Increase derived from 1p cut in basic rate	0·67	1·50	2·34	4·01	4·41	4·41	4·41
(ii) Increase in main income tax allowances	1·68	1·68	1·68	1·68	2·70	2·70	2·70
(iii) Increase in child benefit							
(a) £4·30 per week per child[4]	2·26	8·60	8·60	8·60	8·60	8·60	8·60
(b) £3·07 per week per child[5]	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14
(iv) Reduced rate band of 20 per cent. on first £1,600 of taxable income	1·54	1·54	1·54	1·54	1·54	1·54	1·54
(v) Reduced rate band of 15 per cent. on first £750 of taxable income	1·44	1·44	1·44	1·44	1·44	1·44	1·44

Notes:
[1] Disregarding any change to entitlement to social security income-related benefits except in item (iii)(b).
[2] Assumed to have no reliefs and allowances other than the personal allowance and the married couple's allowance.
[3] Average earnings assumed to be £334·1 per week.
[4] Assuming no change in income support and family credit children's rates.
[5] Assuming corresponding changes in income support and family credit children's rates.

Holiday Homes

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations took place with representatives of the tourism industry before the decision was taken to impose value added tax on the purchase of holiday homes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The change in VAT liability referred to was one of a number of VAT coverage changes made in the Finance Act 1989. The position was made clear to the main trade association concerned in May 1989. The provision imposing the standard rate on holiday homes was subsequently found to be defective in a recent decision in a VAT tribunal. The statutory instrument was designed to return the legal position largely to what was intended in 1989. Before it was debated by the Standing Committee, I met representatives of the British Holiday and Home Parks Association and explained to them that, as tourist services, with the exception of public transport, are liable to VAT I saw no compelling case for a special relief for new, restricted occupancy holiday homes.

VAT (Animals)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what value added tax rate is payable on the sale of *(a)* pedigree cattle, *(b)* pigs, *(c)* goats, *(d)* rabbits and *(e)* shire, show and draught horses;

(2) what rate of value added tax applies to *(a)* bloodstock race horses and *(b)* other types of horse.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Live animals of a kind generally used as, or yielding or producing food for human consumption, including cattle, pigs, goats and rabbits, are zero-rated for VAT. Other animals, including horses of all types, are taxable at the standard rate of 15 per cent.

Unitary Taxation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Government's review of the situation on unitary taxation with the United States Treasury referred to by the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury on 18 December 1989 at column 176, has now been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lamont: The review has been extended to take account of the outcome of the case of Barclays Bank International Ltd. *v.* Franchise Tax Board of the State of California in the Californian appeal court. A decision has now been given in this case and it is hoped to complete the report in the near future.

Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of articles relating to rare and endangered species seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the last complete year for which statistics are held.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the year to 31 March 1990 Customs seized 1,546 live animals and birds, 188 plants and 7,148 parts and derivatives (such as elephant tusks, stuffed animals and birds and goods made from ivory or reptile leather) because their importation or exportation contravened the restrictions imposed by the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 or Council regulation No. 3626/82.

Cigarettes

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in the tax take on cigarettes in real terms since 1987.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the year to September 1990 estimated real receipts from excise duty and value added tax on cigarettes were 8 per cent. lower than in 1987.

Cash Limits

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1990-91 for Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the

cash limit for class XVIII, vote 6 will be increased by £23,438,000 from £647,862,000 to £671,300,000 and the running costs limit by £1,380,000 from £575,799,000 to £577,179,000. The increase in the running costs limit arises from the need to enforce sanctions against trade with Iraq and for extra costs associated with a survey for the Central Statistical Office and a centrally organised telecommunications system project. The increase in the cash limit otherwise is almost wholly accounted for by the need to pay interest on large refunds of VAT being made as a result of recent legal decisions in both United Kingdom and European Community courts. There is also a predicted shortfall in receipts due mainly to a lower-than-expected number of requests by traders for out of hours attendance by officers.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1990-91 for the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 7 will be increased by £4,167,000 from £1,403,945,000 to £1,408,112,000 and the Department's running cost limit by £182,000 from £1,327,395,000 to £1,327,577,000. The change in the running costs limit arises from a transfer from the Cabinet Office (Office of the Minister for the Civil Service) for challenge funding (class XX, vote 1). The change in cash limit also includes the full take-up of the capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990. The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Moate: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there will be any changes to the Treasury's cash and running costs limits in 1990-91.

Mr. Mellor: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 1 will be increased by £407,000 from £77,531,000 to £77,938,000.

The cash limit increase reflects the take-up of £509,000 of the entitlement to carry forward capital underspends announced by my predecessor on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *235-38*, offset by a net reduction of £102,000 in provision for running costs expenditure in the light of reduced requirements. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

A token supplementary estimate will be sought for class XVIII, vote 3, reflecting higher running costs and other expenditure by the Civil Service Catering Organisation in the light of increased trading activity fully offset by an increase in receipts from their customers. The increase in running costs expenditure partly reflects the take-up of the full entitlement of £377,000 to carry forward running costs underspends announced on 25 July 1990.

As a result of these changes, the running costs limit of Her Majesty's Treasury will be increased by £1,988,000 from £83,147,000 to £85,135,000.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Statistical Office's running cost limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary token supplementary estimate, the running cost limit for class XVIII, vote 13 will be increased by £26,000 from £22,457,000 to £22,483,000. The increase reflects the measures planned, in response to the 34th report, Session 1989-90, of the Committee of Public Accounts (Cmnd 1323), to improve the quality of price collection for the retail prices index. The increase in provision for these measures is offset by savings in the capital provision on the same vote.

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to make to the cash and running cost limits for 1990-91 for the National Investment and Loans Office.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 11 will be increased by £249,000 from £1,000 to £250,000. The additional provision is required to cover a shortfall in fees payable on loans to local authorities. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement. The running costs limit will be reduced by £169,000 from £1,369,000 to £1,200,000.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The ECOFIN Council met in Brussels on 28 January. The inter-governmental conference on economic and monetary union met later the same day. I represented the United Kingdom at both meetings.

The meeting began with a discussion of the economic situation in member states as part of the multilateral surveillance under stage 1 of economic and monetary union. It was generally agreed that strict monetary policy was essential, and that structural improvements were needed, particularly in the employment market and that saving and investment needed to be increased and budget deficits reduced.

The presidency introduced its work programme on VAT and excise questions which was endorsed by the Council. I also made a statement emphasising the importance of the recent report on export refunds by the European Court of Auditors, which highlighted the need for improvements in the management of this significant area of the Community budget, in part to reduce the risk of fraud. It was agreed that progress in meeting the court's recommendations should be carefully monitored.

On the basis of a report that the Commission had received pledges of $500 million from non EC members of the G24 and others for a loan to Czechoslovakia, the Council agreed that the Community would contribute a further $500 million and that the necessary legal texts should be adopted as soon as possible. The Council also agreed that the Community would pledge a 50 per cent. contribution, up to $250 million, to a loan by the G24 to Hungary.

Over lunch, I also raised the question of burden-sharing by other countries for the costs of the war in the Gulf, and emphasised the substantial contribution being made to the allied operations by the United Kingdom.

A balance of payments loan to Greece of the order of 2·2 billion ecu (about £1½ billion) was agreed in principle. The first tranche will consist of the order of 1 billion ecu, but the release of further tranches will be decided by the Commission in consultation with the Council in the light of the Greek Government's performance in implementing its programme of economic reform. The formal decision will set out the precise conditions for the granting of this loan and will be taken at the next meeting of the Council on 25 February.

The meeting of the intergovernmental conference focused on procedure, endorsing a proposal by the Presidency that the IGC should concentrate on drafting treaty texts and agreeing, in broad terms the work programme of the next meetings of the IGC. France and Spain introduced proposals on economic and monetary union. The next meeting of the IGC at ministerial level will be on 25 February.

HEALTH

Psychiatric Patients

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of patients from psychiatric institutions who were released into the community and who have been readmitted to psychiatric institutions over the last 10 years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Baby Care Units

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding was provided for special care baby units for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Medicine Labelling

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation for the mandatory labelling of medicines in large print and braille; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to do so. All medicines labelling has to be clearly printed but the provision of braille labelling presents technical difficulties, not least being the lack of space available in which to carry the information required. I understand that some work has been done on this and that the Royal Pharmaceutical Society is having discussions with industry.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether leukaemia sufferers are exempted from prescription charges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Leukaemia sufferers are not automatically entitled to free NHS prescriptions. Those in financial need will qualify for help. There are extensive general exemption arrangements designed to protect those who are likely to have difficulty in paying. Prescription pre-payment certificates are also available for anyone who does not qualify for exemption but who needs a lot of medication, and these can lead to considerable savings. As a result of the present exemption arrangements and pre-payment certificate scheme, a prescription charge is paid on less than one item in five dispensed.

OPCS Cash Limits

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any changes to the cash limits for the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XIII, vote 6 (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys) will be increased by £220,000 from £48,878,000 to £49,098,000. This reflects an increase of £220,000 in capital provision towards the fitting out of the 1991 census regional processing office at Hillington in Glasgow (this represents a timing change within the overall 1991 census expenditure); an increase of £272,000 in the social survey area exempt from gross running cost control for development work on the enlarged labour force survey. This latter cost will be met from within the existing resource of the Department of Employment (class VI, vote 2) and will be financed by an equivalent increase in appropriations in aid. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's current spending on research into myalgic encephalomyelitis; and whether he has plans to increase this in the next financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave to the hon. member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 15 October 1990 at column *659*.

Census

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he has decided to obtain independent advice on the confidentiality arrangements for samples of anonymised records from the 1991 census.

Mr. Dorrell: The president of the Royal Statistical Society, having been consulted about the best procedure, has nominated Professor D. Holt, deputy vice chancellor of the University of Southampton, as technical assessor. I am pleased to be able to announce that Professor Holt has agreed to act in this capacity. He will consider the confidentiality arrangements for the samples of anonymised records (SARs) requested from the 1991 census of Great Britain by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and will assess whether or not the arrangements ensure that any risk of inadvertent disclosure of census information about identifiable individuals is minimised. He will advise the registrars general both on the confidentiality measures included in draft specifications of the SARs and on the proposals for their subsequent use. Once the draft specifications have been revised (if appropriate) as a result of his advice, he will prepare a report for Ministers on the proposed confidentiality arrangements. That report will be considered before any final approval is given for the production and supply of the SARs.

Cash Limits

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any changes will be made to the cash limits and running cost limits of his Department in 1990-91.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 1 (Hospital and community health services, family health services (part) and other services, England) will be reduced by £1,250,000 from £14,194,789,000 to £14,193,539,000. This reduction represents a transfer to class XIII, vote 3.

The cash limits for class XIII, vote 3 (Department of Health administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England) will be increased by £43,255,000 from £691,253,000 to £734,508,000. This provides an additional £42,000,000 for grants to haemophiliacs infected with HIV; £1,250,000 transferred from class XIII, vote 1 following a reapportionment of family health service funds and £5,000 from class XIV, vote 7 for revised manpower costs. The Department's running cost limit is reduced by £4,356,000 from £202,049,000 to £197,693,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Wakefield Health Authority

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on how many occasions over the last five years the finances of Wakefield health authority have been examined by his Department's director of audit;

(2) if he will direct the Audit Commission to conduct an inquiry into the financial management of Wakefield health authority;

(3) on how many occasions over the past five years his Department's director of audit has drawn matters of concern regarding the financial management of Wakefield health authority to the attention of *(a)* the Yorkshire regional health authority, *(b)* the Wakefield health authority and *(c)* other bodies; and what were the matters in question in each instance.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* In common with the arrangements for all health authorities, staff of the Department's director of audit will have made the necessary visits to Wakefield health authority in order to carry out the statutory audit of its annual accounts entailing related examination of its financial systems and procedures.

Matters arising from audits are routinely raised with local management although auditors at their discretion may include subjects in their audit reports which are directed to the Secretary of State for Health but on which resolution is delegated to regional health authorities, who are expected to ensure that remedial action is taken in liaison with the Department.

During the last five years the audit reports on the Wakefield health authority included one such item recommending the complete vacation and disposal of a hospital site which had already been closed for patient care. The Yorkshire regional health authority was involved in resolving this matter.

Responsibility for the statutory audit of the national health service now lies with the Audit Commission. It is for the Audit Commission itself to decide what inquiries are appropriate.

Health Authority Functions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the functions which have been passed from health authorities to local authorities since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 24 January 1991]:* The development and growth of community care over the last 12 years has reshaped the boundary between health and social care, not least by the reduction in the number of children and adults permanently resident in hospital. There has, however, been no transfer of statutory functions in this period.

SCOTLAND

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the date of incorporation and the operational commencement date for the local enterprise company for Argyll, Arran and the Cumbraes;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the dates of incorporation and *(b)* the operational commencement dates of each local enterprise company operating in the area formerly covered by the Scottish Development Agency in 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The local enterprise company for Argyll, Bute, Arran and the Cumbraes was incorporated on 6 August 1990; the remainder of the information requested about incorporation dates is set out in the table.

Local enterprise company	*Date of incorporation*
Borders	30 July 1990
Central	25 May 1990
Grampian	16 May 1989
Lanarkshire	27 April 1990
Lothian	30 April 1990
Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey[1]	1 March 1990
Tayside	22 August 1990

[1] Straddles the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise boundaries.

Operational commencement is not readily linked to a single date. Local enterprise companies' operations have commenced in all cases, with the business planning process, and they are increasingly involved in operational decisions both about individual projects and about matters such as the agreement of new contracts with training providers. The next stage will be for detailed operational contracts to be awarded to companies by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In general, these contracts will be awarded over the next few weeks and will result in local enterprise companies becoming fully operational on 1 April, the same date as Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise take over full operational responsibility from their predecessor bodies.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for 1990-91 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Yes, I intend to make changes to eight of the cash limits within my responsibility as follows.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 3, regional and general industrial support, will be increased by £10,460,000 from £140,716,000 to £151,176,000. The increase is to provide for a special payment of grant in aid to the Scottish Development Agency to extinguish the residual public dividend capital and national loans fund debt prior to the establishment of Scottish Enterprise; this has no net effect on public expenditure.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 8, housing, Scotland will be increased by £8,957,000 from £316,364,000 to £325,321,000. The increase to Scottish Homes grant in aid will provide for the acquisition of stock from local authorities and new towns and for publicising the extension of the rents to mortgages scheme. The increases are partially offset by a reduced requirement for housing support grant due to lower interest rates.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 11, administration of justice, Scotland will be increased by £659,000 from £42,790,000 to £43,449,000. This increase reflects a partial take up of capital end year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990 to meet expenditure on Aberdeen sheriff court delayed from last year.

The cash limit for class XV, vote 15, education, arts, libraries and social work, Scotland will be reduced by £900,000 from £233,975,000 to £233,075,000. This reduction will partially offset the requirement for increased expenditure of £1,517,149 on the St. Helena ship being provided by the Overseas Development Administration. The remainder will be offset by further cash limits reductions of £617,149 to be announced in due course.

The cash limit for class XV, vote 19, general register office for Scotland will be reduced by £200,000 from £7,621,000 to £7,421,000 and the running costs limit reduced by £200,000 from £8,391,000 to £8,191,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 20, Department of the Registers of Scotland will be increased by £1,560,000 from £1,000 to £1,561,000 to cover a shortfall in receipts. In addition, funds available for surrender to the consolidated fund as extra receipts will be reduced from £372,000 to zero. These changes will be partially offset by further cash limit reductions totalling £414,851 to be announced in due course.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 21, Scottish Office administration will be increased by £217,000 from £130,152,000 to £130,369,000. Increased provision is required to reduce the backlog of regional medical service reference work and to meet extraordinary legal expenses. The additional expenditure will, however, be partially offset by a reduction in the cash limits for class XIV, vote 7. Increased provision is also required for expenditure on outward seconded staff but this will be offset by a corresponding increase in receipts. As a result of changes relating to the regional medical service and the running costs provision within class XV, vote 14 the running costs limit for the Scottish Office will be increased by £442,000 from £222,597,000 to £223,039,000.

The non-voted cash limit SOLA2 will be reduced by £10,510,000 from £347,987,000 to £337,468,000. This is required to provide for the acquisition of stock by Scottish Homes from local authorities and new town development corporations.

These changes are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Abortions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of abortions performed in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* each of the health board areas in each of the past 10 years; what percentage they represent of all categories; and how many of the abortions were carried out after (i) 20 weeks, (ii) 24 weeks and (iii) 28 weeks.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about abortions in Scotland by health board of treatment and area of residence, and the statutory grounds under which they were carried out, is published annually in "Scottish Health Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library. The following table shows the numbers of abortions by gestational age for the period 1980-89.

Estimated period of gestation (weeks)	*Year of Termination*									
	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
20-23	92	84	69	65	51	41	51	53	44	26
24-27	10	6	5	6	7	5	5	6	5	3
28+	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Roodlands Hospital, Haddington

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if the announcement by his predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), of 6 September 1990, concerning the provision of a 24-hour treatment service at the casualty unit at Roodlands hospital, Haddington, remains Government policy;

(2) whether a 24-hour treatment service is provided at the casualty unit at Roodlands hospital, Haddington; when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for East Lothian dated 21 December 1990 on that subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I replied on 28 January to the letter of 21 December. My letter explained the full circumstances of the 24-hour casualty service which Lothian health board is providing in Haddington.

Scottish Food

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed in the manufacture of Scottish food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There were an estimated 43,200 people employed in firms employing more than 10 workers in Scotland in 1989 in the manufacture of food. The food

manufacturing industry remains an important industry in Scotland employing more than one in 10 of all manufacturing employees.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to promote Scottish food abroad; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the reasons for the withdrawal of funds from Scottish Food Promotion; who will carry out its functions in future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scottish Food Promotion Ltd. was established in 1987 with support from the Scottish milk marketing board, Scottish salmon board, Scotch Quality Beef and Lamb Association, and the Scottish Development Agency and Highlands and Islands development board. Support from the two development agencies was made on a reducing basis over a three-year period, with the expectation that funding from the private sector would eventually replace public support.

I understand that the SFP board decided to wind up the company when it was unable to attract funding for its new business plan. The promotion of sales by Scottish food and drink companies is primarily a matter for the companies themselves. The Government do provide support through Food From Britain and the Department of Trade and Industry. I understand that the SDA is considering what further public support is needed for Scottish companies and that it will maintain a Scottish presence at major food and drink trade shows.

Registers (Financial Control)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the financial control arrangements for the registers of Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The registers of Scotland (ROS) was approved for exemption from gross running costs control from 1989-90 on the basis of meeting certain management, performance and financial targets, in particular that it should recover the full costs of its services each year. ROS has been unable to meet the cost recovery target this year and will require supplementary substantive provision for 1990-91.

Exemption has therefore been suspended for the remainder of 1990-91 with the result that changes in ROS gross expenditure and its funding have been subject to full Treasury scrutiny.

Net control (the successor to exemption) will resume from April 1991, subject to ROS making good the shortfall in income for 1990-91 in 1991-92.

Crown Office (Cash Limits)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Lord Advocate proposes any changes to the Crown Office's cash and running costs limits for 1990-91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 13, will be increased by £1,365,000 from £28,369,000 to £29,734,000. The Department's running costs limit will be increased by £1,378,000 from £21,701,000 to £23,079,000. This increase will enable the Crown Office to meet additional costs relating to an increase in staff numbers, higher than expected salary increases and the costs of a high level review of the Department recommended by the Public Accounts Committee. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Grant-aided Colleges

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has determined the allocations of grant-in-aid for recurrent expenditure to grant-aided colleges in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The allocations are as follows:

	Offer 1991-92 £m
Craigie College of Education	1·198
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	3·419
Dundee Institute of Technology	6·540
Edinburgh College of Art	3·126
Glasgow Polytechnic	14·525
Glasgow School of Art	2·993
Jordanhill College of Education	8·301
Moray House College of Education	6·259
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh	17·799
Northern College of Education	4·618
Paisley College of Technology	9·757
Queen's College, Glasgow	3·918
Queen Margaret College	4·413
Robert Gordon Institute of Technology	11·154
RSAMD	2·314
St. Andrew's College of Education	2·914
Scottish College of Textiles	2·107

The offers, which are conditional on parliamentary approval of the supply estimates, take account of the substantial increases in the tuition fees which colleges will receive for undergraduate students under the student awards system.

The system of determining grant-in-aid allocations distributes the funds available by reference to a funded number of students for each college, weighted by subject group. Some modifications in the funding system have been made for 1991-92 following consultation with the colleges, notably to transfer from grant-in-aid into aggregate external finance for local authorities most of the resources for in-service training of teachers at colleges of education; and also to reflect more closely colleges' past performance in attracting and retaining students. In addition there are substantial inward transfers from other providers of courses in professions allied to medicine and the built environment. Not counting these transfers, the number of students for whom grant-in-aid provision has been made has been increased by about 7 per cent. in 1991-92 in recognition of the success of the sector in attracting additional students.

The grant allocations take account of the further substantial increases in the level of the publicly-funded undergraduate tuition fees to be paid to colleges as from September 1991 and, after adjusting for transfers, the allocations represent an increase in Government funding of about £20 million; or 14 per cent. compared with the current year if colleges achieve their funded student enrolments. The table shows how grant-in-aid plus estimated tuition fees for funded students will change for individual colleges.

Year-on-year comparison of grant-in-aid and tuition fees

	Grant-in-aid plus estimated tuition fees for funded students (£ million) 1990-91	1991-92	Change Per cent.
Craigie College of Education	1·634	1·850	+13·2
Duncan of Jordanstone	4·994	5·797	+16·1
Dundee Institute of Technology	9·472	10·469	+10·5
Edinburgh College of Art	5·045	5·494	+8·9
Glasgow Polytechnic	16·659	20·105	+20·7
Glasgow School of Art	4·532	5·005	+10·4
Jordanhill College of Education	10·765	11·892	+10·5
Moray House College of Education	8·059	9·119	+13·2
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh	23·783	27·251	+14·6
Northern College of Education	6·070	6·833	+12·6
Paisley College of Technology	13·751	15·611	+13·5
Queen's College, Glasgow	4·113	4·782	+16·3
Queen Margaret College	6·061	7·109	+17·3
Robert Gordon Institute of Technology	15·360	17·814	+16·0
RSAMD	2·924	3·100	+6·0
St. Andrew's College of Education	3·759	4·460	+18·6
Scottish College of Textiles	3·117	3·363	+7·9
All colleges	140·098	160·054	+14·2

Note: The inward transfers of resources for building courses and courses for professions allied to medicine from other sectors, and outward transfers of resources for in-service training of teachers are excluded from the figures.

The allocations reflect the high priority which the Government are continuing to give to higher education. The funding levels will adequately cover cost increases and will also enable the colleges to continue to contribute to the rising participation in higher education of recent years. Colleges are free to recruit students above the levels on which grant-in-aid is based and can thus benefit from the increased tuition fee levels to be paid from public funds for those students who are entitled to students' awards.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table indicating current unemployment levels in each urban development corporation area.

Mr. Jackson: Urban development corporation (UDC) boundaries do not correspond to areas for which unemployment figures are available. Unemployment figures for the travel-to-work areas which include the UDCs, for December 1990, are contained in the following table.

Urban development corporation	TTWA	Total unemployed	[1] Rate
London Docklands	London	230,694	5·8
Black Country	Walsall	12,307	7·3
	Wolverhampton	12,994	8·7
	Dudley and Sandwell	21,115	7·3
Merseyside	Liverpool	63,743	12·6
Tyne and Wear	South Tyneside	9,020	15·5
	Sunderland	20,253	11·0
Teeside	Stockton on Tees	8,357	10·7
	Hartlepool	5,207	13·3
	Middlesbrough	16,147	11·5
Cardiff Bay	Cardiff	16,497	7·1
Leeds	Leeds	23,325	6·4
Central Manchester / Trafford Park	Manchester	62,138	7·3
Sheffield	Sheffield	25,609	8·9
Bristol	Bristol	20,548	5·5

[1] Per cent. of workforce.

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement regarding his decision to stop the expansion of the sheltered placement scheme in 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* The sheltered placement scheme (SPS) is part of my Department's sheltered employment programme. Since 1985 the scheme has been extremely successful in offering people with severe disabilities a wide choice of employment opportunities.

In 1990-91 my Department is making available to local authorities and voluntary organisations £4·2 million more than the previous year to support jobs for people with severe disabilities. Our first priority in using this additional money has been to help maintain the jobs of existing SPS workers by increasing the grants paid to sponsors to assist in meeting their rising wage bills and administrative costs. In 1990-91 the scheme will support an average of 6,700 sheltered placement jobs throughout the country at an estimated cost of £15·7 million. Whilst there has been no increase in the number of SPS places in 1990-91, previous patterns of turnover indicate that some 1,000 existing places nationally are likely to become vacant to allow new entrants to join the scheme.

Cash Limits

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any change will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson *[pursuant to his reply, 8 November 1990, c. 10]:* Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following further changes will be made:

The cash limit for class VI, vote 1 (training and enterprise programmes) will be reduced by £152,233,000 from £2,452,338,000 to £2,300,105,000. Of this reduction, £145,000,000 will be transferred to class VI, vote 2 to offset a £132,400,000 increase in European social fund payments to third parties and a number of other minor changes. In addition £4,217,000 is transferred to class VI, vote 5 for the sale of the STA. Further transfers result in a net decrease of £3,016,000.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2 (other programmes and central services), will be increased by £10,830,000 from £214,197,000 to £225,027,000. This increase is offset by a reduction on the class VI, vote 1 cash limit.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 3 (employment service), will be increased by £24,000 from £415,304,000 to £415,328,000. This increase is offset by reductions on class VI, vote 1. The changes include the transfer of £658,000 from class VI, vote 1 in connection with the transfer of the employment rehabilitation service and increased provision of £93,000 for additional statistical work on the RPI. These increases are partly offset by receipts from the CSO and increased receipts as a result of the employment service revenue generation scheme.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 4 (Health and Safety Commission and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service), will increase by £1,242,000 from £137,211,000 to £138,453,000. This increase is offset by a reduction of the cash limit on class VI, vote 1. The main changes relate to a transfer of £1,500,000 from class VI, vote 1 to pay for higher staff relocation costs and the effects of the transfer of the railway inspectorate. These increases are partly offset by higher receipts.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 5 (Sale of Skills Training Agency), will increase by £4,217,000 from a token £1,000 to £4,218,000. This increase is offset by reductions in the cash limit on class VI, vote 1. The increase is to fund the main sale expenditure of the Skills Training Agency, and to reflect a reduction in receipts due to delays in the sale of properties and leases.

As a result of these changes, the DE group cash limits will fall by £135,920,000. However, public expenditure will reduce by only £3,520,000 because the £132,400,000 increase in ESF payments to third parties shown on class VI, vote 2 is due to its receipts which do not score in DE's cash limits but are included in public expenditure totals.

The running costs limit for the Department of Employment (Votes 1,2,3 and 5) will be increased by £25,726,000 from £916,267,000 to £941,993,000.

The running costs limit for the Health and Safety Commission will increase by £1,680,000 from £100,621,000 fo £102,301,000.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

DEFENCE

Gulf War (Pay)

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the comparative rates of pay of reservist troops and regular troops, by rank, serving in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All regulars and reservists serving in the Gulf receive the same basic rates of pay. However, reservists are entitled to a taxable supplement of up to 20 per cent. of service pay (and more in special cases) to help make up any loss of civilian earnings up to a maximum total ceiling, including service pay, of £55,000.

Territorial Army Reservists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 16 November to the hon. Member for Don Valley, *Official Report*, column *228*, if he will make it his practice to keep central records of individual casualties among Territorial Army reservists.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Gulf War (Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated daily cost of the British presence in the Gulf arising from the invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current full daily operating cost of the British presence in the Gulf arising from the invasion of Kuwait is estimated to be over £4 million per day.

Gulf Oil Spills

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what protection is available to the United Nations Environment Programme global environment monitoring system studying oil spills in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom has received no request for any form of protection for UNEP global environment monitoring system personnel in the Gulf.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the areas of Iraq that are sufficiently far from military action to constitute safe areas for prisoners of war under article 14 of the Geneva convention.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The targets being attacked by the coalition are sites which could pose a threat to allied forces or facilities supporting Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Article 23 of the third Geneva convention states that no prisoner of war may at any time be sent to, or detained in areas where he may be exposed to the fire of the combat zone, nor may his presence be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations. Iraq has not yet provided any information to the International Committee of the Red Cross on the personnel being held or their location, nor permitted the ICRC to satisfy itself that they are being held in accordance with Iraq's obligations.

Cash Limits

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are any changes to the defence cash limits and running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Tom King: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(1) Defence Cash Limits

£'000s

Class and Vote	*Current Cash Limit*	*Change*	*Revised Cash Limit*
I, 1	9,108,295	+100,000	9,208,295
I, 2	8,944,597	+196,728	9,141,325
I, 3	1,407,570	+10,975	1,418,545
I, 4	1,930,960	−87,901	1,843,059
I, 5	494,027	+40,000	534,027

These changes, which increase the block Defence cash limit by £259,802,000 from £21,885,449,000 to £22,145,251,000, are principally to cover costs arising from the deployments of British forces to the Gulf area. The changes also take account of a number of minor transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments. They are consistent with the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

(2) Running Costs Limit

Within the block Defence cash limit the running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £66,011,000 from £5,362,678,000 to £5,428,689,000. This is mainly for additional running costs being incurred on the Defence budget as a result of the crisis in the Gulf area.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmental Protection

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he made to Commissioner Ray MacSharry to seek to ensure that environmental protection measures are linked closely with production and budgetary reforms to the common agricultural policy being discussed by European Commissioners.

Mr. Curry: As my right hon. Friend the Minister made clear in his reply to the hon. Member for Bosworth on 23 January at column *247*, we did not have the opportunity at the last meeting of the Agricultural Council to give our views on the EC Commission's ideas for reforming the common agricultural policy, but at next week's Council we intend to argue for the closer integration of agricultural and environmental policies.

Tourism

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations took place with representatives of the tourism industry before the abolition of capital grants for the provision of tourist accommodation under the farm diversification scheme.

Mr. Curry: In reaching a decision the Ministry took into account a range of views and considerations including those of the tourism industry.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission to raise the levels of reimbursement for payments made in environmentally sensitive areas in objective 1 and 5b areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: None, since any increase would be bound to apply to other member states. A general rise would increase the overall cost of existing schemes to the United Kingdom Exchequer without any direct benefit to United Kingdom farmers.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish a consultation paper on reforms to bring about more explicit environmental benefits from the hill livestock compensatory allowances system.

Mr. Curry: I plan to consult interested parties as soon as we have specific proposals to present on how the existing environmental benefits afforded by hill livestock compensatory allowances might be made more specific.

Drift-net Fishing

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to protect fish stocks in waters for which Britain is responsible from the activities of drift-net fishing.

Mr. Curry: The small-scale drift net fisheries found in United Kingdom waters are considered to be relatively selective in operation, targeting certain fish species reasonably effectively. Various restrictions including minimum mesh size controls may be applied in these fisheries, and those for salmon and trout in particular are tightly regulated.

Food From Britain

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what percentage of funding through Food From Britain was spent promoting Scottish food; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what percentage of funding through Food From Britain was spent promoting Welsh food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The information is not available in the form requested. Food From Britain has the task of promoting British foodstuffs from all parts of the United Kingdom, and offers services to food companies without regard to their geographical location.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to promote *(a)* English food abroad and *(b)* British food abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Government are fully committed to the promotion of food from the United Kingdom both at home and abroad. We provide substantial financial support to the national food marketing organisation, Food From Britain, so that its resources and expertise can be drawn upon by British food producers, manufacturers and traders in increasing the sales of British food to the consumers of the world.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to make any changes to his Department's cash limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. The non-voted cash limit MAFF/LACAP (supplementary credit approvals for flood defence and coast protection) will be increased by £2,300,000 from £13,230,000 to £15,530,000, to enable local authorities to devote additional resources to coast protection work following the severe winter storms at the beginning of 1990.

The cash limit for class III, vote 5 (departmental research, advisory services and administration) will be reduced by £2,000,000, from £285,096,000 to £283,096,000, reflecting a predicted shortfall in spending on capital works.

The net increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the autumn statement.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Missile Technology Control Regime

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries that are currently members of the missile technology control regime and the date on which they became members.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The missile technology control regime was established in 1987 by Canada, France, the FRG, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1989 Spain also adhered to the MTCR guidelines. In 1990 six further countries, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway, also announced their adherence to the MTCR.

Weapons

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest list of weapons outlawed by international law; and what efforts the United Kingdom is making to extend that list.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is no international agreed list of outlawed weapons. However, restrictions on certain types of weapon are included in a variety of international agreements. Such restrictions apply only to countries which are parties to the agreement.

Iraq (Muslim Holy Sites)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter of 28 January to the hon. Member for Linlithgow concerning damage to Muslim holy sites in Iraq.

Mr. Hurd: I am arranging for a copy of my letter of 28 January to the hon. Member to be placed in the Library of the House.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 4 and 5 February. Ministers will discuss the situation in the Soviet Union and the consequences of events in the Baltic states for the EC's aid proposals. They will also discuss food aid for Romania and Bulgaria and the extension of European Investment bank lending to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. The Council may review progress towards the resumption of negotiations on GATT, and will consider EC/United States trade in aircraft. Political co-operation issues will also be discussed. The ministerial meeting of the inter-governmental Conference on political union on 4 February will consider progress made by Ministers' personal representatives.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 4 and 5 February and will discuss the development of the common agriculture policy, the agriculture aspect of the GATT Uruguay round and EC quality standards for fresh and frozen sheep carcases.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 25 February to consider financial assistance to central and eastern Europe and aid to the USSR. The abolition of fiscal frontiers appears on the agenda but no substantive discussion is expected. The ministerial meeting of the inter-governmental conference on economic and monetary union on 25 February will hold a general discussion on progress made to date by Ministers' personal representatives.

Prisoners of War

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the United Kingdom and other countries to ensure that prisoners of war held by Iraq are being treated in accordance with the Geneva convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on 31 January at column *605*.

Falkland Islands (Fishing)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on Japanese drift-net fishing in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Falkland Islands Government, who manage the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone and the Falklands outer conservation zone, are not aware of any drift net fishing in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands.

Taiwan

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Taiwanese authorities regarding drift-net fishing; and if he will make it his policy to ban all Taiwanese fishing in waters for which Britain is responsible until the Taiwanese end the use of drift-nets.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no dealings with the authorities in Taiwan. We welcomed the decision of the authorities in Taiwan in September last year to comply in principle with the resolution on large-scale pelagic drift net fishing adopted by the 44th General Assembly of the United Nations. We also welcomed the additional

measures undertaken by the authorities in Taiwan such as a ban on the building of new drift net vessels and a ban on the operation of drift net fishing in the Atlantic. We do not propose to take action against Taiwan fishing vessels.

British Overseas Territories (Fishing)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which countries licences have been granted for fishing operations in the economic exclusion zone waters of British overseas territories.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Dependent territories of the United Kingdom do not have exclusive economic zones, but a number of them have fisheries jurisdictions. Licences have been issued to vessels and associations from a number of countries; it is not normal practice to enter into licence agreements with foreign Governments.

Cash Limits

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any changes in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made: The cash limit for class II, vote 1 (overseas representation) will be increased by £18,058,000 from £534,722,000 to £552,780,000. In addition, the running costs limit on vote 1 will be increased by £14,986,000 from £477,103,000 to £492,089,000. These changes reflect increased costs due to the Gulf crisis; construction of buildings and adverse effect of overseas price movements.

The cash limit for class II, vote 2 (other external relations) will increase by £11,402,000 from £176,019,000 to £187,421,000. This takes account of increased costs on Vietnamese boat people; international conferences; FCO scholarships; military assistance; consular expenditure in the middle east as a result of the Gulf crisis and higher than forecast expenditure on our contributions to international organisations due to the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

The cash limit for class II, vote 3 (external broadcasting and monitoring) will increase by £4,760,000 from £142,685,000 to £147,445,000 to take account of increased rental for Bush house and increased costs as a result of the Gulf crisis.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4 (the British Council) will increase by £2,076,000 from £76,233,000 to £78,309,000 to take account of the adverse effect of overseas price movements. These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

Saudi Arabia

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being given to British nationals to leave Saudi Arabia following the cessation of civilian flights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have arranged for British nationals to leave Saudi Arabia on Kuwait Airways flights from Dhahran. Only about 230 British nationals have taken up this opportunity. The last of these flights left on 30 January.

Saudia Airlines is operating a service of three flights a week between Jedda and the United Kingdom and a daily shuttle service between Jedda and Riyadh. British Airways will provide a similar service between London and Jedda from 31 January. It continues to be possible to travel without difficulty by road between Dhahran, Riyadh and Jedda.

The American military have also offered seats on their aircraft to British nationals.

TRANSPORT

Boom Equipment

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation has taken place, and what advice has been received, from local authorities as to the adequacy of the scale, type and amount of boom equipment stationed in Scotland for use in an oil pollution incident.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department's marine pollution control unit (MPCU) keeps local authorities fully informed of the content of its stockpiles of beach protection and cleaning equipment and is always ready to consider any suggestion they might make about the amount or type of equipment it keeps. However, there have been no formal consultations with, or advice from, local authorities as to the adequacy of the scale, type and amount of boom equipment stationed in Scotland for use in an oil spill incident.

As I explained in my answer of 4 July at col. 563 the MPCU's stocks of highly mobile resources, including booms, are on short notice stand-by at various locations around the United Kingdom from where they can be quickly deployed to the west coast of Scotland, or any other part of the United Kingdom which may be threatened by a major oil spill.

The adequacy of these resources is kept under constant review and following the Rosebay incident off the south Devon coast in May of last year, the MPCU has taken steps to enhance substantially its stockpiles, including the one at Cambusbarron in Scotland, by improving its stocks of booms, shoreline barriers, skimmers and other equipment.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage an increase in freight and passenger traffic using Prestwick airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is for airlines to decide whether they wish to mount services using Prestwick, and for BAA plc, as the owner of the airport, to encourage them to do so. Proposals put forward for new services by foreign airlines will be considered as quickly as possible within the framework of the appropriate air service agreements, and account will be taken of the Government's wish to see effective use of Prestwick.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give, for Great Britain as a whole and for Scotland, the total rail route length, and the percentage which is electrified, including projects approved or under construction.

Mr. Freeman: At 31 March 1990 British Rail had 10,307 route miles in Great Britain of which some 28 per cent. are electrified or will be electrified by projects approved or under construction. British Rail has some 1,700 route miles in Scotland, 10 per cent. of which are or will be electrified.

Rail Crossings

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the railway inspectorate's review of footpath crossings announced in his answer to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) on 9 July at column *96* has been completed; and if he intends to place a copy of the review's findings in the Library when it is completed.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is reviewing the warning and layout arrangements at footpath and bridleway crossings and the criteria for their application. Its findings will be published in due course as an additional chapter to the railway construction and operation requirements for level crossings. A copy will be placed in the Library at that time.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of British Rail's review of all the footpath and bridleway crossings of the east coast main line and proposals for bridges or underpasses at, or stopping-up or diversion of, those crossings.

Mr. McLoughlin: This is a matter for British Rail. Proposals to stop up certain level crossings on the east coast main line railway are contained in British Rail's East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill. If this Bill is given a Second Reading, it will be for the Committee appointed to consider it to take evidence on the case for British Rail's proposals.

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department issues to local authorities with regard to the reinstatement of existing provision for disabled people, such as dropped kerbs and tactile pavements when roads are being repaired and reinstated.

Mr. Freeman: Highway authorities are required under the Disabled Persons Act 1981 to have regard to disabled persons when considering the provisions of ramps at appropriate places between carriageways and footpaths. The Department of Transport's advice on these provisions, including such features as dropped kerbs and tactile pavements, is contained in departmental advice notes TA 52/87 "Design Considerations for Pelican and Zebra Crossings" and TA 57/87 "Roadside Features", and in the Department's disability unit circular 1/86. Where provisions are in place we would recommend that they are retained when roads are repaired and reinstated.

Cycling Accidents

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, in descending order by borough, the number of cycling accidents in each London borough in the last three years.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows.

	Number
1987	
Westminster	266
Wandsworth	200
Camden	191
Lambeth	190
Southwark	180
Islington	180
Hounslow	168
Richmond	160
Ealing	159
Hillingdon	154
Kingston	139
Bromley	137
Croydon	136
Kensington and Chelsea	129
Lewisham	117
Hammersmith and Fulham	110
Barnet	107
Enfield	105
Hackney	104
Tower Hamlets	100
Havering	97
Bexley	96
Greenwich	94
Brent	89
Merton	87
Sutton	86
Waltham Forest	82
Newham	81
Redbridge	75
Haringey	69
Barking and Dagenham	62
Harrow	60
City of London	32
1988	
Westminster	323
Lambeth	233
Southwark	195
Camden	189
Wandsworthk	186
Islington	179
Ealing	161
Hounslow	155
Kensington and Chelsea	151
Kingston	146
Hammersmith and Fulham	141
Bromley	137
Hillingdon	137
Croydon	134
Richmond	132
Hackney	131
Lewisham	111
Enfield	107
Barnet	102
Newham	93
Waltham Forest	91
Brent	90
Tower Hamlets	90
Havering	88
Merton	83
Greenwich	83
Barking and Dagenham	77
Haringey	73
Redbridge	69
Harrow	68
Sutton	68
Bexley	66
City of London	38

	Number
1989	
Westminster	461
Lambeth	322
Southwark	245
Camden	233
Wandsworth	228
Islington	219
Kensington and Chelsea	208
Ealing	201
Hounslow	194
Hammersmith and Fulham	173
Hillingdon	173
Richmond	170
Croydon	153
Barnet	151
Bromley	150
Tower Hamlets	145
Kingston	138
Hackney	127
Lewisham	123
Enfield	121
Greenwich	119
Havering	118
Waltham Forest	112
Brent	111
Haringey	111
Newham	105
Redbridge	96
Merton	94
Sutton	91
Bexley	74
Harrow	73
Barking and Dagenham	66
City of London	58

Source: London Accident Analysis Unit fact sheets 18 and 33.

Cycling

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress towards implementing the 1,000-mile cycle lane network in London.

Mr. Chope: In 1990 the London planning advisory committee consulted all London highway authorities on the proposals for a 1,000-mile strategic cycle network. Replies are being co-ordinated by the London Cycling Forum. Results are expected later this year.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the availability of finance to local authorities for the provision of cycling facilities.

Mr. Chope: Transport supplementary grant (TSG) and credit approvals for local authority capital expenditure on highways are allocated in the light of information included in authorities' annual transport policies and programme (TPP) submissions.

The Department's circular inviting TPP submissions for 1991-92 said that expenditure on provision for cyclists will be considered for TSG where it is integral to a highway or traffic management scheme which meets the criteria for TSG accepted expenditure. Specific cycling schemes, in addition to those which form or are part of a local safety scheme, can also qualify for TSG support if they are intended to reduce accidents on roads of more than local importance. This can involve not only the construction of facilities on main roads (such as cycle lanes and cycle crossings) but also the development of cycle routes on minor roads which attract significant numbers of cyclists away from roads of more than local importance.

Most expenditure on cycling facilities is likely to take the form of "minor works" for which authorities are given a block allocation of accepted expenditure. Other expenditure on cycling, as on all other categories of expenditure, may be funded from within authorities, approved levels of borrowing, from capital receipts or from revenue.

There is no predetermined share of the total resources available reserved for cycling facilities, and it is for individual authorities to decide how much of their overall allocations to devote to them.

Child Safety Belts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he can now announce the date at which rear seat belts for children in cars will become mandatory.

Mr. Chope: Regulations requiring children under 14 years of age to be restrained when travelling in the rear seats of cars, where appropriate restraints exist and are available, came into force on 1 September 1989.

The European Commission is currently discussing a proposal for a directive on child restraint construction which is expected to include requirements on installation involving both restraint and vehicle manufacturers.

Road Repairs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an estimate of the cost of maintenance and repairs for motorways and roads for 1990.

Mr. Chope: The latest forecast of expenditure on maintenance of motorways and trunk roads in England in 1990-91 is £543·8 million.

This includes £419·5 million of capital expenditure on the renewal of roads and the renewal and strengthening of bridges (including the Severn bridge) and £124·3 million of current expenditure on roads and bridges.

A19 Improvement Study

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make available sufficient funding to enable the recommendations contained within the A19 improvement study prepared by consultants Bullen and Partners on behalf of the northern regional office of the Department of Transport to be implemented in full.

Mr. Chope: The consultant's report listed recommendations for improvements to the A19 in an order of priority. The scheme with top priority, Testo's roundabout improvement, is currently under way.

The other improvements recommended will be processed within the annual programmes of regional improvements as funds permit.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the cash limit and running costs limit for his Department.

Mr. Rifkind: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limits in class VII will be changed as follows:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit*	*Changes*	*£ thousand revised cash limit*
VII			
1	1,798,862	[1]4,027	1,802,889
2	259,693	[2]9,037	268,730
4	135,796	[3]13,500	149,296
5	267,519	[4]1	267,520

[1] Take up in part of entitlement to end year flexibility announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990 (*Official Report*, cols. 235-40). There is a transfer of £100,000 from the Department of Environment (class VIII, vote 6) consequent upon the decision to pay grant direct to English Heritage and a token provision to enable certain payments in respect of the construction and maintenance of roads.

[2] There are increases of £8,900,000 transferred from class VII, vote 1, for the relocation of part of my Department and for additional accommodation costs and capital equipment, £20,000 in respect of first aid work and OMCS challenge funding allocations and £288,000 shortfall in appropriations in aid offset by a reduction of £171,000 resulting from the transfer of railways inspectorate to the Department of Employment (class VI, vote 4).

[3] Increases to cover shortfall in appropriations in aid of £13,500,000 in respect of the sale of marks scheme.

[4] Token. Provision has been made to enable increased expenditure on urban traffic control which will be recovered from local authorities.

The running costs limit of the Department of Transport has been increased by £2,847,000 from £322,416,000 to £325,263,000 as a consequence of running costs increases on two Votes. The bulk of this increase comprises the transfer of £2,700,000 from programme expenditure on class VII vote 4.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total published today in the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement.

The Gulf (Pollution Control)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has made to the Saudi Government's request for the loan of small numbers of skilled pollution control experts and advisers.

Mr. McLoughlin: Two pollution control experts, one from the Department's marine pollution control unit and the other from the DTI's Warren Spring laboratory, arrived in the Gulf yesterday.

Both have considerable experience in dealing with pollution arising from oil spills dating back to the Torrey Canyon incident off the Scilly isles in 1969 and both have been involved in clean-up operations in the Gulf on previous occasions.

Their role will be to advise the Saudi Government on response techniques and any possible needs for additional equipment.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his meeting with EEC colleagues on 29 January about the standing task force of national experts on oil pollution going to the Gulf; and if he will give a breakdown of the numbers and experience of such a task force.

Mr. McLoughlin: The meeting held on 29 January at official level was of a technical nature aimed at assessing the situation in the light of available knowledge, considering possible response strategies and determining the extent to which the Community might be able to help if requested to do so by the Saudi Government.

Member states expressed a willingness to help and it is clear that much equipment and expertise is available if required. However, I am also aware that considerable counter-pollution resources already exist in the Gulf area as a result of existing contingency plans to deal with spillages of oil from tanker casualties and other sources. It is important therefore not to mobilise European resources until it is clear that they would be needed and not simply hinder the operation.

The EC task force has no specific number of personnel. It is drawn from member states in response to specific requests to the EC for assistance and its composition will vary from incident to incident depending on the type of help and advice being sought.

Rail Technology

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to examine the new European rail technology being developed by Powell Duffryn Standard Limited.

Mr. Freeman: BR plans to use low-platform wagon technology for channel tunnel freight services, and I am taking a close interest in the development of this new rolling stock. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) visited Powell Duffryn in Cardiff last September, and I hope to visit their recently acquired French operation in April.

Dartford Tunnel

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on forthcoming closures of the Dartford tunnels for carriageway repairs.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Investigations into the condition of the existing tunnels at Dartford are continuing. Until they are complete and have been evaluated, no forecast can be given of the extent and timing of any closures. If closure of one of the tunnels does become necessary, it will not happen until some time after the opening of the new bridge at the end of this summer. The increased capacity would then provide three lanes of traffic in each direction during any closure, 50 per cent. more than at present.

Speed Limits (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer on 7 December 1990, *Official Report*, column 254, if he has determined Essex county council's highway committee's application of October 1988 to extend the 30 mph and 40 mph speed limit zone in Dembury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 31 January 1991]:* Approval in principle was given to Essex county council on 27 December 1990. I now await their application for confirmation of this order. I understand this is likely to be submitted sometime early in March.

Road Links

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the names of the consultants appointed by his Department to examine a possible new road link between Exeter and Plymouth and a second

Tamar road bridge; what was the date they were appointed; what is the proposed timetable and their terms of reference; and what are the organisations from whom evidence will be taken.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 25 January 1991]:* Consultants have still to be appointed for the assessment of the needs of the A38 between Exeter and Plymouth which was announced in "Roads for Prosperity". The assessment is likely to take about 12 months.

The proposal for a second Tamar crossing was one of the six projects on which the private sector were invited to express views on the suitability for private finance in June 1990. The responses are under consideration and an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

The Department is joining with the local authorities in a traffic study of Plymouth and its environs; this should be complete by the end of 1991.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

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